



ipodlounge | Buyers' Guide 2005

From the world's leading **independent** source of iPod information

Inside: **Pick the perfect Pod**
The first iPod FM radio tuner
Incredible new car kits and
wireless accessories

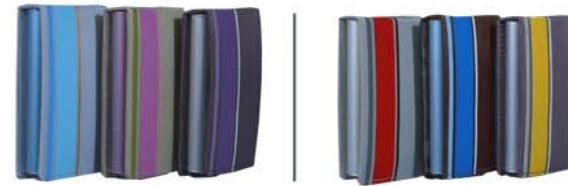
How to pull music off your iPod
Download free iPod music legally
and much, much more!

Over
300
Accessories
Reviewed
Inside

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MetroVue for the iPod mini

3 pack for girls and guys . includes clip



TrailVue for the iPod mini

available colors . includes clip



Sportsuit Convertible for all iPod models

available colors . includes armband and clip



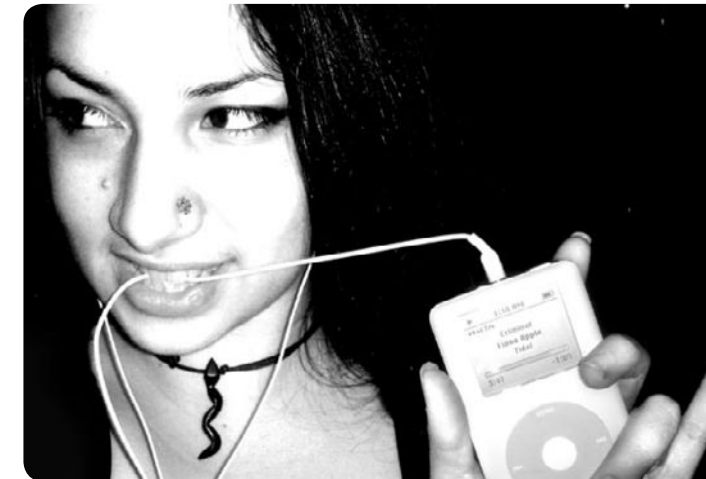
Sport Grip for the iPod shuffle

available colors . includes carbiner



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Buyers' Guide Spring/Summer 2005



Above:
"Partners in Crime"
Submitted to the iPodlounge
"Me and My iPod" Photo Gallery



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Putting music on your iPod and
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ON THE COVER

The cover of the Buyers' Guide Spring/Summer 2005 was drawn by contest winner Bo Kristensen (www.bolicious.com), who wins a pair of Shure E5c earphones and a TEN Technology naviPlay Bluetooth Stereo Kit for his submission. Congratulations!

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Learn all about the new iPodlounge.com web site.

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If you've been thinking of buying an iPod, or trying to convince a friend to join the revolution, this is the place to start. We tackle every question you might have, from choosing an iPod to commonly asked questions, then introduce you to the worlds of iPod accessories and the people who love them: the iPodlounge community.

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The future of iPod accessories begins with this complete look at amazing new ways to expand and protect your favorite iPod. An FM radio for your iPod? Check. Bluetooth wireless broadcasting systems? Check. iTripLCD? Check.

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Your iPod was made to play music. We look at ways to load your collection up for free or for as little as 4 cents per song, and check out iPod parties around the world.

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Note: All advertisements appearing in this Buyers' Guide are clickable.

Editorial: An iPod for everyone. Dropping iPod features, pack-ins, and prices will win Apple millions of new customers. What's next?

By late 2004, Apple Computer had become the industry leader in the American market for digital music players, but it was clearly ready for even greater success. So in January of 2005, Apple shocked the world with a \$99 iPod - the **iPod shuffle** - and then followed up in February with a new \$199 **iPod mini** and a \$349 **iPod photo**. No clarification of the announcements was necessary: Apple was looking to win over the entire world, product by product, niche by niche, and ready to do whatever it took to convert the masses.

In each case, Apple achieved price reductions by doing the unthinkable: cutting features and pack-ins. Want a \$99 iPod? You'll have to give up the iPod's famous screen, menus and Click Wheel controller. Want a \$199 iPod? They'll leave the power adapter out of the box. How about a \$349 iPod photo? Well, if you want to view the photos on your TV - or connect your camera directly to it for downloads- you'll need to buy separate cables or an iPod photo Dock.

Bad moves? Hardly; by the standards of the competitors who would dismiss it, the iPod shuffle's sales are already staggering. And though we'd love to know that every iPod box contained every single part a new iPod owner might need, Apple's new low initial price, pay-later-for-what-you-need strategy will entice far more people. When the company shipped the \$599 iPod photo last year with a box full of accessory goodies, we said in this very space that we loved it, but didn't know how well it would sell. Apparently, the price was a turn-off, causing Apple to make its fastest and deepest iPod price reduction ever - \$150. And with that cut, almost all the packed-in accessories just disappeared from the box.

While we loved the photo Dock, Apple's AV cables had partially overlapping functionality, and its "free" case was bland. So now Apple lets you buy or ignore them if you want. Same with the iPod mini and shuffle: if your computer has a powered USB 2.0 port, you can charge both for free. If not, go grab a separate power adapter. Accessories have just become a key part of iPod life.

Over the 102 pages of our first 2005 Guide, we'll look at each member of the new iPod family, and tell you about the very best add-ons we've seen and tested for all of them. Like you, we keep practicality and prices in mind whenever we evaluate new iPods and accessories, so you can be sure we're looking out for you whenever we give out an A, B, C, D or F rating - even if it's hard to do.

Of course, we're constantly interested in what's coming around the corner, and if industry insiders are to be believed, the remainder of 2005 will be focused on the middle- and high-end of the iPod family. Expect wireless headphones, car solutions, and more. We can't wait.



Dennis Lloyd
Publisher

A passionate, long-time lover of Apple products, **Dennis Lloyd** (dennisl@ipodlounge.com) was a graphic designer and DJ before creating iPodlounge. Dennis directs the site's forums, photo galleries, iPodlounge User Group, and general business affairs, which have grown under his watch to include approximately two million readers and numerous accolades. Happily married with one dog (Rocket the Wonderdog), one cat (Ferris), many iPods, and two turntables, he lives in and loves Irvine, California.



Jeremy Horwitz
Editor-in-Chief

Jeremy Horwitz (jeremy@ipodlounge.com) has written for publications ranging from Electronic Gaming Monthly to The New York Times, having founded and edited Ziff-Davis' Intelligent Gamer magazine. A cum laude graduate of Cornell Law School and author of the book Law School Insider, Jeremy presides over iPodlounge's and the Buyers' Guide's editorial content, focusing special attention on iPod reviews and emerging technologies. He lives with his girlfriend Heather and Siberian Husky Sake (Sah-kay) in Irvine, CA.

Larry Angell

is iPodlounge's News Editor. Based in Ohio, Larry has covered Apple products for years and owned every generation of the iPod. Previously, he worked in the mobile electronics industry with world champion car audio professionals, and currently lives with his girlfriend, cat, and dog.



Bob Levens

is iPodlounge's Chief Forum Administrator and a contributor to the site. Located in Cambridge, U.K., Bob has worked in such diverse career fields as the nuclear power industry, TV and radio engineering, the Royal Air Force and the Ministry of Defense. He lives with his wife, dog, and four iPods.

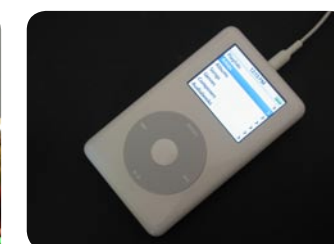


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News in Review Critical changes in the world of iPod since our last Buyers' Guide, taken from iPodlounge.com's frequently updated news pages.



Apple debuts \$99 iPod shuffle, 6GB mini, 30GB photo

Price-conscious potential buyers targeted; most expensive iPod drops from \$599 to \$449 as pack-ins disappear

The launches were spread across two different months, but they were both aimed at price-conscious buyers: Apple's January 11, 2005 release of its least expensive digital music player - the flash memory-based **iPod shuffle** - had been planned for months, with only the name and form factor open to question. A 512-Megabyte (120 song) version is priced at \$99, while a 1-Gigabyte (240 song) unit is \$149.

First shown as part of Apple CEO Steve Jobs' keynote speech at San Francisco's annual Macworld Expo, the gum pack-sized devices use low-capacity memory chips instead of hard disks, and entirely omit earlier iPods' screens and Click Wheel controls. Named for the iPod's randomized playback option, shuffles can pull songs arbitrarily from your iTunes music library or handle a single playlist worth of tracks, playing back

either in a specified or random order. Each iPod shuffle requires a powered USB 2.0 port to recharge its 18-hour battery, and includes headphones, a lanyard USB cap, and a non-lanyard USB cap. Nationwide sell-outs were immediate.

On February 24, 2005, Apple lowered the prices of both its iPod mini and iPod photo offerings, and added new models to each line. A "second-generation" 4-Gigabyte iPod mini with 18-hour battery life debuted for \$199, with a 6-Gigabyte version at \$249, each in silver, blue, pink, or green colors. The company simultaneously released a 30GB (\$349) version of its color-screened iPod photo, and a price-dropped 60GB (\$449) model, each stripped of the numerous pack-ins included with their October 2004 predecessors. Reviews of all of the new iPods follow in our updated Buyers' Guide.

Forty-Gigabyte iPods discontinued, iPod "photo" de-emphasized - is a full-sized iPod fade to color imminent?

Though January saw only an expansion of the iPod family, February also saw two models discontinued. Apple quietly pulled the plug on two different 40-Gigabyte iPods - the \$399 fourth-generation iPod and \$499 iPod photo - leaving 20GB iPods as the only full-sized black-and-white units on the market. The discontinuations followed iPod hard drive supplier Toshiba's



announcement that a thinner, less power-hungry 40GB drive was forthcoming soon.



But something larger may be afoot: the color iPod photo may be poised to become the

"standard" iPod. Apple has thrice de-emphasized the "photo" name, first removing the capital "P" on photo weeks after the product's 2004 launch, then changing its box to reduce "photo" to a small badge, and most recently referring to the devices as "iPods with Color Displays" in its March 23, 2005 iPod Software Updater. What's next? We'll soon find out.

iPodlounge provides up-to-the-minute iPod news on its front page at ipodlounge.com, and also maintains a complete archive of news stories dating from 2001 to the present day at ipodlounge.com/archives.php.

Coming soon: the new lounge. Change is important and inevitable. Sneak a peek at the evolution of the world's top independent iPod web site.

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- 2 | Our Photo Galleries
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- 8 | MyPod
- 9 | Contests and More
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When we decided last year to redesign the iPodlounge site, “simplification” and “organization” were our guiding principles. Primarily, we wanted to make it easier to search and enjoy our vast collection of iPod information.

Though the new **iPodlounge Logo** (1) still features a little white music player relaxing on a lounge chair, we’ve changed the font and layout to a more modern look. We’ve also moved our famous **Photo Galleries** (2) to a more prominent position on the page.

The **iPodlounge Navigation Bar** (3) still provides one-click access to all of iPodlounge’s main site sections and sub-sections. We’re still tweaking all of the section headers in the sample here, but we’ll be adding one-click links to all of our most popular sections. Finding our articles, free music downloads, iPod software and other areas will be easier than ever: the second (gray) line of the navigation bar changes based on the heading you select, offering single-click links to areas deeper within the site. You can

still search the entire site at once with the **Search Window** (4). Type a single-word phrase to search the site’s database of nearly 7,000 articles, or use Advanced Search for more options. You can separately search the over 500,000 posts in our Discussion Forums by clicking on the Forums link in the Navigation Bar.

Featured Reviews and Articles sections (5) spotlight our newest and most important reviews and articles. We’ve also shifted our **News** (6) upwards and eliminated redundant headlines that used to be at the top of the page. There’s now a permanent link to the **Buyers’ Guides** (7), followed by **MyPod** (8), a one-click way to get all the information you need for any iPod model. Only iPodlounge offers historical information dating back to the earliest iPods.

We promote **Recent Reviews and Site News** at (9), and now devote considerable space to several key sections of iPodlounge: **Ask iPodlounge** (10), our weekly Q&A with iPodlounge staff, **Tutorials**, **iPodlounge Backstage**, our **Discussion Forums**, and key software **Downloads** (11).

And of course, iPodlounge appreciates the support of its **advertisers** (12), so please pay them a visit and keep the iPodlounge site free for our readers.

Coming soon: the new lounge. Change is important and inevitable. Sneak a peek at the evolution of the world's top independent iPod web site.

What else has changed? Our reviews.

iPodlounge’s reviews are widely respected as the most comprehensive and accurate on the planet. Now we’ve tweaked our review layout to make them even easier for you to use. Get the bottom line, grade, and other key information at the top of every review. Read our definitive full text only if you want the details.

Need iPod help? “Ask iPodlounge.”

We know that our readers occasionally need expert help with iPod hardware and software issues, so we created Ask iPodlounge, a weekly question-and-answer column. Every week, a member of the iPodlounge team tackles five reader questions, providing short and easy answers. And all of the past columns are archived and summarized for easy viewing. See a sample of Q’s and A’s on pages 18-19.

Or try our new Discussion Forums.

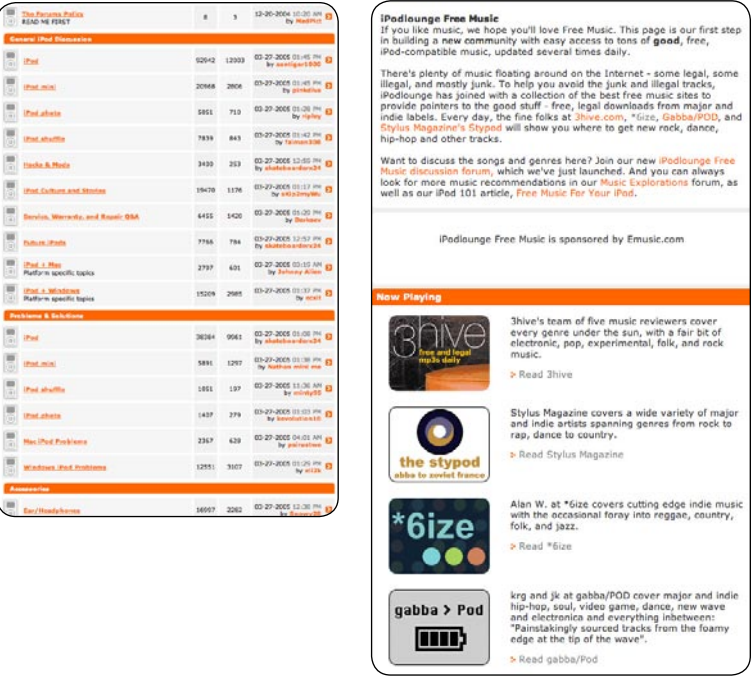
Need a faster answer? We’ve reorganized and enhanced our famous Discussion Forums to make them even easier to use. If you just want to talk about iPods, visit one of the General forums, but if you’re having a problem, go straight to Problems and Solutions for your specific iPod. Need software help? Want to find an accessory? Or just want to discuss music? You’ll find what you need in 60 seconds. And you can always use the handy Search button to find any specific topic in a flash.

How about some Free Music?

If you’re trying to figure out how to fill your iPod with all sorts of free audio goodness, you’re in luck. We’ve created iPodlounge Free Music, a section of the site dedicated to helping readers find legal, free music online. With a list of free download links and portals to sites that scour the Internet for excellent no-cost audio tracks, iPodlounge Free Music should be your first stop after you finish filling your iPod with the songs you own. iPodlounge also is doing its part to support Podcasting, a way new web broadcasters can create and spread their own radio-style programs for any every topic under the sun. We’ve created two Podcasts of our own, and we now provide links and other information in our Podcasting sub-forum, as well.

Everything else is the way you loved it.

We haven’t changed everything - we’re just polishing every inch of the lounge to make it sparkle. You’ll still see our great news, insightful features, useful iPod 101 and 201 tutorials, and iPodlounge Backstage. With the new site, they’re easier to find. Let us know what you think of our tweaks by e-mailing Dennisl@iPodlounge.com. And enjoy!



What is an iPod? Apple's digital music player replaces Sony's old Walkman with a smaller, better idea. Stop carrying tapes or CDs in your car or bag; the iPod stores up to 15,000 songs in your pocket. Full-sized iPods (left) and iPod minis (center) are almost identical in functionality and features, but differ in size, storage capacity, and price. iPod shuffles (right) have far fewer features.

iPod/iPod photo



Headphone Port

The circular hole's for any pair of headphones; the oval for optional remote controls and other add-ons.

Hold Switch

Slide left on the iPod, right on the mini to prevent accidental button presses. Red = "hold."

Screen

Color-screened iPods (currently called "iPod photos") have 2-inch, 220x176 pixel, 65,536-color displays with white backlights, and can display photographs. Black-and-white iPods have 2-inch, 160x128 pixel screens, and iPod minis have 1.67-inch, 138x110 pixel displays, each with a blue-white backlight.

Click Wheel Controls

Five buttons and a flat, touch-sensitive scrolling surface control the iPod. Menu brings you back to a menu, while the center Action button selects what's highlighted on screen. Forward, reverse, and play/pause are push-buttons, while volume and scrolling are controlled by brushing your finger over the flat wheel.

Body

Today's full-sized iPods have plastic fronts and chrome backs; iPod minis have aluminum bodies with plastic tops and bottoms.

Dock Connector Port

Power chargers, speakers, and most other accessories connect to the iPod's bottom port.

iPod mini



Which one's right for me? Ranging in price from \$99 (the shuffle) to \$449 (the top-of-line 15,000-song iPod photo), the iPod family grows in power, functionality, and size as prices go up. Two have color screens, two have none.

	iPod shuffle 512MB	iPod shuffle 1GB	iPod mini 4GB	iPod mini 6GB	iPod 20GB	U2 iPod 20GB	iPod photo 30GB	iPod photo 60GB
Number of Songs	120	240	1000	1500	5000	5000	7500	15000
Price	US\$99	US\$149	US\$199	US\$249	US\$299	US\$349	US\$349	US\$449
iPodlounge Rating	A-/B	A-/B	B+	B+	A-/B+	A-/B+	A-	A-
Buy if You Carry	Your greatest hits collection, played in any order		An 80-100 CD music collection, accessible by track		A large or high-quality music collection and/or lots of data		A serious music collection and photos and/or data	

Headphone Port

The shuffle's simple circular port is for headphones, and doesn't work with standard iPod top-mounting accessories.

Control Pad

Apple's simplified controls include five buttons on front for volume up and down, track forward and backward, and play/pause. A power switch is on back, and toggles between ordered and randomized playback. Power is indicated with a light on the back; play and data status with two lights hidden above the Control Pad.

USB Port

Instead of a Dock Connector, the shuffle's USB port plugs directly in to any computer, and recharges its battery there.

Body

Shuffles are all white plastic save the gray rings on their Control Pads, the metal USB ports, and fabric lanyards.

Caps

Two USB caps are included with every shuffle: one for your pocket, another with an integrated lanyard necklace. They lock into place with ball bearings, and won't fall off.

iPod shuffle



Why would I prefer one iPod to another?

If you're only looking to carry around eight of your favorite CDs, the \$99 iPod shuffle is a good solution - cheap, small, and easy to use. But the true iPod experience starts with the mini and full-sized iPods, which store every CD you own and give you one-finger access to any song at any time. The cell phone-sized \$199 iPod mini holds 80-100 CDs worth of music - just enough for the typical person's current music collection - plus text and games. And serious music lovers will want at least the 5,000-song capacity of the standard iPod - extra space means less reason to replace your iPod in the near future.

That said, color-screened iPods are the future: they store more music than all other iPod models, and display photographs and album artwork, too. With bigger bodies, they're not as easy to wear on your neck or arm during workouts or jogs, but not impossible, either.

	iPod shuffle	iPod mini	iPod	iPod photo
Battery	12-18 Hours	18-26 Hours	9-13 Hours	15-17 Hours
Size & Weight	3.3"x1.0"x0.3", 0.78 oz	3.6"x2.0"x0.5", 3.6 oz	4.1"x2.4"x0.57", 5.6oz	4.1"x2.4"x0.6" or 0.7" 5.9-6.4oz
Body Colors & Materials	1 Plastic	4 Aluminum	2 Plastic+Metal	1 Plastic+Metal
Key Pack-In	Lanyard	Belt Clip	None	None
Plays Music	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stores Data	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Has Screen	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uses iPod accessories	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shows photos	No	No	No	Yes

Which iPods do iPodlounge editors prefer?

We own and enjoy all of them, but our favorites are the iPod photo for everyday use and either the 20-Gigabyte iPod or the iPod mini for workouts. None of us could just own an iPod shuffle and nothing else, and even the iPod mini's 4- and 6-Gigabyte sizes are limiting.

What do the different iPods include? Every iPod includes different packed-in accessories. If the iPod you want doesn't come with all of the accessories you want, you can buy Apple's or others separately.



Headphones

Every iPod includes Apple's famous white earbuds, which deliver decently clear and balanced sound. They'll withstand a year or so of steady use, and Apple sells replacements as part of a \$39 pack with a remote control. Substantially better replacement headphones from other companies range in price from \$19 to \$900.

iPodlounge recommends: Look for an excellent pair of replacement headphones, because you'll be shocked at how much sonic detail and richness you miss with an inexpensive pair. Our top options appear later in the guide, but we strongly recommend an investment of at least \$60 - likely more if you want a pair you'll never want to give up.



Cables

When we wrote our Buyers' Guide last year, every iPod included two iPod-to-computer cables: one for PC users with USB ports (\$19), and one for Mac users with FireWire ports (\$19). That's changed. iPod shuffles ship with no cables; iPod minis and photos now ship with only one USB cable, and no FireWire cable; standard iPods ship with both, but probably won't by the end of this Summer. Third parties now sell cables, too.

iPodlounge recommends: Get the extra cables you need from Apple, Griffin, or another legit company. Beware of no-name iPod cables sold on the cheap - they may seriously damage your iPod.



Wall Chargers

As with cables, every iPod used to include a wall Power Charger (\$29). Not any more: iPods and iPod photos include them, but iPod shuffles and minis do not. Apple now makes separate FireWire and USB Chargers, so match them up with the right iPod cables.

iPodlounge recommends: If your iPod doesn't include a Power Charger or you need a second one, consider Capdase's Universal AC Adapter (\$28 + shipping), which includes changeable face plates that you can use when traveling overseas. It works with all current iPods except the iPod shuffle, which will require a computer, one of Apple's USB Chargers, or an AirPort Express Base Station (\$129) to recharge.



iTunes Software

Every iPod includes a CD-ROM with PC and Mac versions of Apple's famous iTunes software. iTunes has everything your computer needs to turn your CDs into iPod-compatible digital music files, organize and automatically name those files, then put them on your iPod. It's easy enough for kids and grandparents to use, and has built-in help files just in case.

iPodlounge recommends: Savvy new iPod users can download iTunes for free from Apple's web site and start converting their CD collections before their iPods have arrived. Make sure to save all files in highly compatible MP3 format.



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iVod DJ

Featuring vinyl click wheel protection

We have a vast selection of leather colors to match your style. Already got yours? 

What are the most common iPod add-ons people buy? The iPod was designed for use with headphones, but it's become an ideal way to listen to music in your car, home, and office. These optional accessories help a lot.



Cassette Adapters

If your car has a cassette tape deck, one of these \$10-25 adapters will transfer iPod audio through your car's speakers. Each company's adapter varies in sound quality from the others, so see our Buyers' Guide to make a smart decision. Griffin's new SmartDeck both plays iPod audio and lets your car stereo buttons control the iPod.

iPodlounge recommends: Steer clear of the Coby adapter in the photo - it's cheap, but sounds it, and has a greater tendency to develop problems than our top-recommended Sony CPA-9C Car Kit. If you shop carefully, you can find the CPA-9C for less than \$15.



FM Transmitters

Though the sound quality on FM transmitters is nowhere near as clean as a good cassette adapter, these \$30-45 accessories let you broadcast iPod songs to any car or stereo system's FM radio. We rank the best of these transmitters as a "distant third option" after cassette adapters (second) and direct line-in connections to your car (first).

iPodlounge recommends: Many people buy FM transmitters, but few are entirely satisfied with their quality. If you don't have a cassette deck in your car, and want better-sounding audio, consider a custom car installation (\$150 and up). We highlight good options later on.



Car Chargers

iPod battery power can be maintained or even recharged with the numerous car chargers now available, with prices ranging from \$20-50. The best chargers we've tested also include an "audio line-out" port that lets you hear even better audio than what comes out of the iPod's headphone port. And some chargers even include car mounts, too.

iPodlounge recommends: See our reviews for top picks. iPod mini owners should look at TEN Technology's FlexDock, while full-sized iPod owners should take a look at our Sneak Peek at MacMice's PodBuddy. These options combine charging, audio output, and gooseneck mounts at affordable prices (\$60-70).



Cases & Travel Cases

The single most popular type of iPod accessory is the protective case: from fabric and rubber to leather and metal, cases can keep your iPod scratch- and bump-free. Travel cases are a bit larger, but hold your earphones and sometimes other accessories, as well.

iPodlounge recommends: We've highlighted a wide variety of cases immediately following our reviews of the iPod shuffle, iPod mini, and both full-sized iPods. iPod cases are now sold by big companies, indie artisans, and everyone in-between. Beware of case makers who don't have good reputations for customer service, and look for cases that make you feel comfortable about both protectiveness and fashion.



Docks

Apple used to include iPod Docks for free, but now they're \$39 add-ons for the iPod mini and standard iPod. A Dock mounts your iPod on a table and provides data and clean stereo audio outputs. The iPod shuffle Dock (\$29) only provides a USB data output cable, but the iPod photo Dock (\$39) also provides a S-Video output port for clean photo display on a television. You'll generally need to buy cables separately.

iPodlounge recommends: If you don't need audio or video outputs, consider dock substitutes such as Thought Out's iPed series, Power Support's Stands, or DVforge's The Stand or DVBaseLtd - if you can find one. You'll want a real dock if you connect to non-portable speakers.



Speaker Systems

There are many different types of speaker systems - ultra-portable ones you toss in a pocket, portable ones that run off batteries and fit in a bag or briefcase, semi-portable ones that aren't practical to take everywhere, and non-portable ones that can't be carried around. Some of the speakers include a dock for your iPod, while others don't. Dockable systems range in price from \$85-\$400, while other speakers range from \$30 to thousands of dollars. Our top picks in each category appear later in the Buyers' Guide.

iPodlounge recommends: This Beginners' Guide includes a full break-down of your options. Read it before making any investment!

iCleaner™



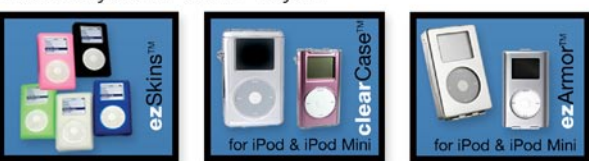
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Protect your iPod in Style!



Power for your iPod. Don't let the Music Stop!



www.ezGear4U.com

How can I make the iPod work in my car? Your car's stereo will force you to pick one of three music connection solutions. Then you'll want a charger and a mounting harness. Before you read our reviews, get the big picture here.

Use your car's FM radio

If you don't have a tape deck or the cash for a high-quality audio cable, use this combination to broadcast iPod tunes to an empty channel on your car's FM radio. You can also consider 3-in-1 kits such as TEN's flexDock and DLO's TransPod FM.



FM Transmitter

+



Power Charger

+



Car Mount

Total:

\$70-160

Use your car's tape deck

If your car has a cassette tape deck, you're in luck: iPod audio through a good cassette adapter sounds better than FM transmission and costs less. You'll still want a way to charge and mount your iPod, and you might also want a remote control.



Cassette Adapter

+



Power Charger

or



Power + Line-Out

+



Car Mount

Total:

\$60-140

Use a CD-quality cable

A recent car may have a stereo "aux" (auxiliary) input on the front of its radio. If your car doesn't, you can buy a line-in kit - it's expensive (and you'll need to install it or pay someone else), but sounds great. Then you'll need to mount your iPod.



Line-In Kit

or



Car Aux Port



Minijack Cable

+



Car Mount

Total:

\$25-230+

How can I listen to the iPod without headphones? Speakers.

Four types of iPod-ready speaker systems are now available, each trading off price, sound quality, and size. Pick the system or systems that best meet your daily needs.

Ultra-Portable



\$30-40

Portable



\$80-180

Semi-Portable



\$80-300

Non-Portable



\$99+

Cost:

Cheap

Pricey

Varies

Varies

Ultra-portable speakers such as Pacific Rim Technologies' Cube Travel Speakers, Macally's PodWave, and PodGear's PocketParty range from \$30-40 in price - not bad by comparison with others.

Portable speakers such as JBL's On Tours, Altec Lansing's inMotions, Logitech's mm22s, and Logic3's i-Station range in price from \$80 to \$180, not a good value given their audio performance. But size counts.

Semi-portable speakers such as Macally's IceTune, DLO's iBoom, Elecom's ASP-700i, Bose's SoundDock, JBL's On Stage, and Tivoli's iPAL range from \$80 to \$300. Size makes them a decent compromise.

Non-portable speakers such as JBL's Creature IIs, Altec Lansing's FX6021s, and Klipsch's GMX-A 2.1 range in price from \$99 to much, much more. You'll also want an iPod Dock to add quality.

Sound:

So-So

So-So

Good

Great

Made for one- or two-person listening, these generate enough volume to be heard in a quiet, small indoor setting. Outdoors, or in big rooms, they're almost useless. And they're low on bass.

With enough sound to barely fill a small- to medium-sized room, these systems tend to distort audio or just not play it at high volumes. The best of these isn't as rich as larger but comparably priced options.

These systems generally sound as good or better than the portable solutions, but rarely as good as a solid but inexpensive set of non-portable speakers - ones that cost 1/2 or 1/3 the price.

With small satellite speakers and large subwoofers, these systems deliver sub-sonic bass that has some rumble, plus clean treble and mid-range response. Their top volumes are also higher.

Size:

Pocket

Briefcase

Varies

Large

These are the smallest speakers you can find: they'll fit into a pants pocket (unless you wear tight jeans), and run off of battery power. Sometimes they can use optional AC adapters, too.

They can't fit in your pocket, but they fold into flat-ish shapes that fit into a briefcase or medium-sized purse. All run off batteries or included AC adapter power, so you can travel without a hassle.

We call these "semi-portable" because they either can't fit in a briefcase or don't use battery power. In either case, you'll use them primarily in your home, even if they're marketed as portable.

Except for really high-end speakers, you'll be able to move these around a bit within a home or office, but you won't want to carry them from room to room with any frequency. Leave them be.

Rank:

Two (Tie)

Two (Tie)

Three

One

For those times when you need a cheap, easy way to hear your iPod without headphones anywhere you go, these can't be beat.

If you're a frequent traveler or carry your speakers every day for a commute, these do a solid job - so long as you're not really picky about audio.

As these aren't going to move around much, you often do better to buy a good non-portable system, and cheap portables for rare occasions.

For the dollar, these sound much better than the other alternatives. We recommend that you buy a set unless you truly always need portability.

How do I put music on my iPod? Apple makes CD-to-iPod transfers easy with iTunes, but some people don't have the time or patience for disc copying. Thankfully, there are a number of other options, free and otherwise.

How do I transfer music off my iPod? The most commonly asked question at iPodlounge is the one that Apple's customer service agents can't answer. Our iPod 101 article makes it easy for PC or Mac users to extract tunes.



Rip CDs with iTunes

The process couldn't be much easier: insert a music CD into your computer and iTunes will quickly connect to the Internet, figure out the correct artist, track, and album names, then let you click two times to save the CD in MP3 or AAC file formats. You can even set iTunes to do the entire conversion process automatically.

Most likely because of concerns over piracy, iTunes makes it easy to transfer music from a computer to an iPod, though not the other way around. But there are legitimate and legal reasons a person would want to transfer audio from the iPod to a computer: desktop hard drive failure, the purchase of a new/replacement computer, distribution of iTunes Music Store downloads to your five legally authorized computers, and so on.

While there are many third-party programs that perform iPod-to-computer transfers, virtually all of them found in iPodlounge.com's Downloads section, we'll mention only three popular ones here. For the PC, there's iPodAgent, a free program with many options in addition to the music copying feature. For the Mac, there's iPodRip, a \$10 Shareware option with a nice interface and iTunes playlist regeneration. And for both platforms, there's PodUtil, a £10 Shareware program which offers powerful copy features and iTunes playlist regeneration. Since PodUtil's interface and features are identical on both platforms, we'll show you how it works.

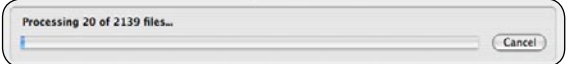
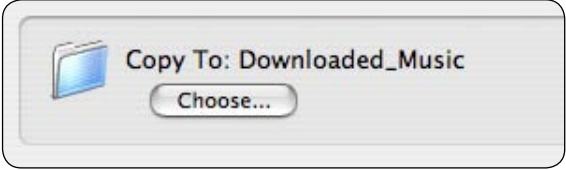
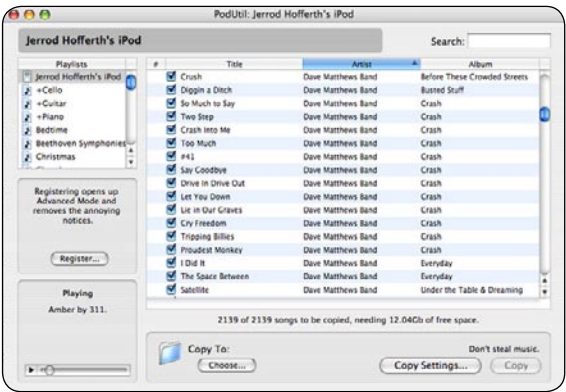
Start on the computer you want to use as an iPod receiving station, and make sure iTunes is installed. Then download PodUtil from the link found at http://www.ipodlounge.com/downloads_list.php, and install it on the computer. Next, connect your iPod to your computer with one of Apple's cables. Whatever you do, CLICK NO if and when iTunes asks you whether you want to delete the content on your iPod. And ensure that "Enable Disk Use" is selected for your iPod in the iTunes iPod Settings window.

Now launch PodUtil. PodUtil will detect your iPod, examine its database, and display a list of all of your tracks in the main window, with a listing of your playlists on the left. In this window, you can search for tracks (in the top right corner) or preview them straight off of the iPod by double clicking on one.

To prepare for the music copying process, you'll need to make a few choices. At the bottom of the main PodUtil window, pick the computer directory where PodUtil should dump iPod music. Then, at the bottom right of the main window, hit the "Copy Settings" button. PodUtil can create separate subdirectories for each Artist and Album in your collection if you select these two options. If you turn on the additional iTunes features, PodUtil will automatically add the copied songs to your library and recreate your iTunes playlists -- two helpful features when restoring lost libraries.

Next, de-select the songs (either in the main track list or in individual playlists) that you don't want to transfer to the computer. When only the correct tracks are selected, click "Copy" in the bottom right of the main window to begin the process!

When the upload is complete, you'll have a directory (or, if you selected the appropriate options, an iTunes Library) full of your iPod music. With only a few button clicks, you have now transferred your iPod's entire music library to your computer. This little program - and others like it - take a painstakingly complex process and reduce it to a few easy button clicks. Now if only Apple would include the same feature in iTunes...



✓ All I Want	Alanis Morissette
✓ You Oughta Know	Alanis Morissette
✓ Perfect	Alanis Morissette
✓ Hand in My Pocket	Alanis Morissette
✓ Right Through You	Alanis Morissette
✓ Forgiven	Alanis Morissette
✓ You Learn	Alanis Morissette
✓ Head Over Feet	Alanis Morissette

Pay Someone Else to Rip

Services such as RipDigital will send you a box for your CDs, convert them all into iPod-compatible files, and send everything back to you for \$129 and up. The process takes around seven days and \$129 for a 100-CD collection, with higher prices and more time required for larger collections.



iPodlounge Free Music

Download music for free from one of iPodlounge's Free Music sites, featuring great rock, pop, electronic and jazz. Or find places you can trust to provide free and legal songs. Spoken word's available, too.



Apple's iTunes Music Store

Pay 99 cents per track or \$9.99 per album for over 1 million songs at Apple's leading digital music store. Downloads are only playable on iPods and computers with iTunes, unless you turn them into CDs.



Competing Download Services

See our Music section for details on lower-priced alternatives, but be aware that these sites have fewer songs than Apple's store, and other (Microsoft, Sony, Real, and Walmart) stores aren't iPod-compatible.

Other iPod 101/201 Articles on iPodlounge.com

- 101 | How to Import CD Tracks to iTunes
- 101 | How to Create Playlists in iTunes
- 101 | How to Create Smart Playlists in iTunes
- 101 | How to Burn a CD in iTunes
- 101 | Tagging Songs in iTunes
- 101 | Adding Album Art in iTunes
- 101 | Printing CD Covers and Lists in iTunes
- 101 | Using Party Shuffle in iTunes
- 101 | Using the iTunes Music Store
- 101 | The Complete Guide to iPod photo pictures
- 101 | The Complete Guide to the iPod shuffle
- 201 | iPod Synchronization
- 201 | Using Your iPod as a Hard Drive
- 201 | Moving Your iTunes Library to a New Drive
- 201 | Free Music for Your iPod

How can I get more help? If you can't find the answer on Apple's site or in an iPodlounge 101/201 tutorial, submit your question to our weekly Ask iPodlounge column, or join our free, wide-ranging Discussion Forums.

Ask iPodlounge offers readers the opportunity to get answers to their iPod-related questions from a member of the iPodlounge editorial team. Several questions are answered each week, and are drawn from inquiries sent to ask@ipodlounge.com for consideration. We reserve the right to edit questions for grammar, spelling, and length.

The two iPod, one computer family

Q: I have a 40GB fourth generation iPod with approximately 4,000 songs, which are also stored on the hard drive of my computer. I have purchased an iPod mini for my wife and would like to know the best (and simplest) way to manage the songs on both. I would like to auto-sync all of the songs from the hard drive to the 40GB iPod and would like my wife to be able to pick and choose the songs she would like on her mini. Both iPods will be working from the same account in iTunes.

- Chris

A: Since you only want to automatically sync one of the iPods, you can accomplish your goal easily. When you connect your wife's iPod mini, click the iPod icon at the bottom-right of the iTunes window to display the iPod preferences. Check Manually Manage Songs and Playlists.

When your wife connects her iPod, iTunes will not attempt to synchronize any music. To add music to her mini, just drag items onto the iPod icon in the Source list: you can drag individual songs, playlists, albums, artists, or entire genres. Your wife can make any number of playlists, and all their contents will be copied when dragging them to her iPod. She can set up her own playlists and leave them in iTunes, if it doesn't bother you to have those additional playlists in iTunes and auto-synchronized with your iPod. Depending on how she wants to access music - by playlist, or browsing by artist, album, etcetera - either adding playlists or adding music directly will be good options for her.

No, I really wanna rock

Q: Is it possible to set up the iPod to change the EQ setting automatically according to the genre of music? For instance, if a song with the "rock" genre is playing, can the iPod be configured to auto-set its EQ to "rock?"

- Daniel

A: No, you can't do this automatically, but you can set the EQ setting for individual songs. Rather than do this for every song on your iPod individually, here's a shortcut. In iTunes, create a smart playlist where the Genre is Rock. Click this playlist to display all the songs it contains. Select all the songs, then display the Info window (Ctrl-I on Windows; Command-I on Mac).

Click the Equalizer Preset menu near the bottom of the Info window and select Rock (or whatever EQ setting you want to use). Click OK to close the window and apply this setting. The next time you sync your iPod, iTunes will re-copy all those songs with the EQ setting you have chosen. When you play them on the iPod, the EQ will change for whatever songs you have applied EQ settings to. You can repeat this operation for other genres you have in your library.

Silence isn't golden

Q: I have several songs that have a few minutes of silence at their ends. Is there any way to edit the songs so they end right when I want?

- Paul

A: Select one of the songs, then select File > Get Info. Click the Options tab. Near the bottom of this window, you'll see Start Time and Stop Time fields. Change the Stop Time to where the song ends; when you play back the song, the silence will be gone.

How big of an iPod do I need?

Q: How much more space do Apple Lossless files take up than MP3s? Is the sound quality that much better? I am trying to decide between an iPod mini and a larger iPod.

- Jim

A: Apple Lossless files take up anywhere from about 1/3 to 1/2 the size of the original music files; this means that a one-hour standard CD, which takes up about 600 MB, will occupy from 200 to 300 MB in Apple Lossless format.

As for the sound quality: lossless compression loses none of the original information encoded in the music files. It is as good as the original CDs. However, you should try encoding in AAC or MP3 format at high bit rates (the maximum is 320 kbps) to see if you can hear the difference; even if you are sensitive to sound quality, it is very possible that you won't hear the difference between, say, an AAC file at 256 or 320 kbps and the original CD. If you're going to use inexpensive headphones with your iPod - like the ones that come in the package - you may not hear any difference between a 160kbps file and the original.

I mind the gap, especially when I dance

Q: When I import dance CDs into iTunes, and then to my iPod, it replays them with a one-second gap between songs. How can I get these dance tracks to play without gaps?

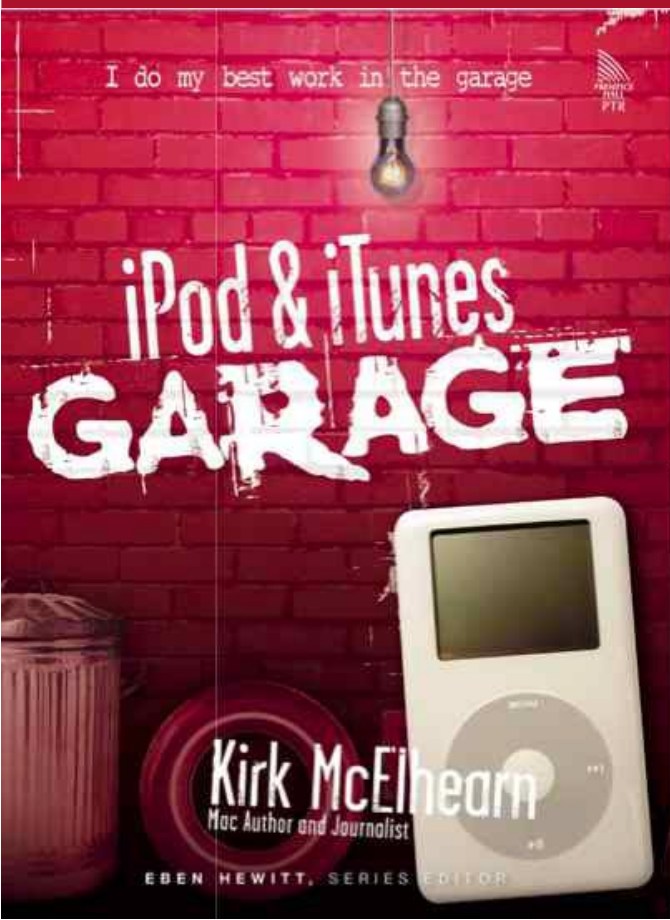
- Gavin

A: Unfortunately, the iPod inserts gaps between tracks at all times. The only way to get around this is to import an entire CD as a single track. You won't be able to play individual songs from the CD, but you will be able to play it in order with no gaps.

To do this, insert a CD into your computer. When the CD's tracks display in iTunes, select them all (Command+A on Mac, Control+A on Windows), then select Advanced > Join Tracks. This joins all the tracks into a single track. When you click the Import button, iTunes imports the entire CD as one track.

You can also join just a few tracks on a CD, or join groups of several tracks. Select the ones you want to join (they must be consecutive), and select Join Tracks. When you import the CD, you'll have several tracks, each containing a few songs.

Ask iPodlounge columnist Kirk McElhearn is the author of several books including iPod & iTunes Garage. His blog Kirkville (www.mcelhearn.com) features articles about the iPod, iTunes, Mac OS X and much more.



Our Discussion Forums: 50,000+ members means you're never alone

With roughly 400 people online at any given moment, iPodlounge's Discussion Forums are the place to go for quick responses to your questions... and a place to find iPod-loving friends. We've archived years of discussions online, so there's a good chance you'll find an answer to your question before you even have to ask it. Just look for Forums on iPodlounge's top-of-page navigation bar.

Sticky: iPod won't mount (ID 1234 - last page)	62	86185	03-21-2005 12:00 PM	by darren-arbore
Sticky: REVISOR & UPDATER: The CONSIDERED Version: Mac and "Two Channel" Issues (ID 1234 - last page)	66	12697	03-17-2005 07:31 PM	by brentmeyer
Sticky: Solution to PC shutting down after mounting iPod	2	201	02-11-2005 07:27 AM	by studioquested
Sticky: iPod 2.01 update for Windows Users (ID 1234 - last page)	189	48556	02-26-2005 10:00 PM	by ohm
(A) All my CDs in iTunes?	2	11	03-27-2005 03:17 PM	by afionamvick
(A) iTunes And my iPod	0	3	03-27-2005 03:30 PM	by Jimmy E
Old Update files	0	2	03-27-2005 01:29 PM	by ed2k
Downloading from iPod to iTunes	1	28	03-27-2005 12:42 PM	by AndyD
Can I upgrade from MM8 to iTunes to drive my iPod?	0	11	03-27-2005 11:40 AM	by bigpoints
Adding photos with windows ME	1	6	03-27-2005 11:31 AM	by jenshahn_jm
Shutting through tracks? Really do need some help from some of you guys	13	354	02-27-2005 10:06 AM	by dave44
No "Silently Remove Hardware" seen Win98	0	7	03-27-2005 07:59 AM	by a1ade
some help now in some cases windows 98	1	23	03-27-2005 07:47 AM	by a1ade
Do you need to run updates?	2	58	03-27-2005 07:45 AM	by a1ade
usb control	3	50	03-27-2005 06:53 AM	by yelkinevents

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www.etymotic.com

What's Next in Accessories? Lower-end iPod accessories are old news. The next wave of add-ons will have super powers and come at steeper prices. These are some of the fastest-growing categories we're currently watching.



High-End Speakers

Last year, Bose's \$299 SoundDock set a new record for dedicated iPod speaker pricing, but sold very well during the holidays. Now Klipsch is angling to take their crown with iFi, a \$399 system with considerably more bass horsepower, a separate docking station, and two of the company's reference-class satellite speakers. And other companies are waiting in the wings, too.



Car-Specific Installs

Car manufacturers and aftermarket add-on makers alike are rapidly jumping on the iPod bandwagon with options that range from simple to stunning. Clarion's touch screen-equipped iPod integration kit for multiple makes of vehicles includes track information and controls; some new Mercedes Benz cars will come equipped with a simpler system integrated into the dashboard.



Video Playback

No, that's not a video iPod from Apple - it's Nyko's Movie Player (est. \$249, mid-2005), an add-on 3.5", 65,536-color screen with a DVD-style control dock and two speakers. (This prototype will change in design.) Movie Player lets you use the hard disk of an iPod stored in its undercarriage to store movies and photos to play back at will. You'll need to convert your existing media into a format the Movie Player recognizes, but Nyko includes PC and Mac software that guarantees they'll work. It's a fascinating experiment, and no doubt will score an audience until and unless Apple comes up with a similar product of its own. If it's good enough, perhaps even longer.



Home Integration

The "whole-home audio" specialists at Sonance have developed iPort (\$599), a way to dock your iPod physically within one of the walls of your house. All of your digital music can be shared with any wired room of your house, and controlled with optional touchscreen pads. See our Sneak Peeks section for wireless alternatives with different designs.

What's Next for Apple? The iPod maker's labs and lips are sealed, but signs are pointing in four directions for Apple Computer's future.

Macs and Mac minis

Apple's release of the \$499 Mac mini computer was no accident: like the first iPod, it was clearly a dip in the low-end pool for the notoriously high-end computer maker. It didn't take long for accessory makers to toast the newest Mac with all sorts of cosmetic improvements, and Apple has apparently been working on Mac mini-specific iPod add-ons, as well. It remains to be seen whether the company will posit the iPod or an iTunes-equipped Mac as the center of an in-home music and media center, but smart bets are currently on "both." The company's unexpected release of PC- and Mac-ready AirPort Express wireless routers may only be the first step in a much bigger plan.



Games, Games, Games

PC manufacturers have historically proved clueless as far as games are concerned, and Apple's sadly no exception. After squandering its game console chances with the forgettable Pippin, the company missed the growth of dedicated 3D graphics cards, and couldn't lure top-flight game studios to release popular sequels (read: Doom 3) first on the Mac. Now Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo control console, PC, and handheld gaming. Still, recent job postings indicate that Apple is looking to develop some in-house gaming talent for its iPod division. We're not sure if Macromedia Flash-quality games (right) will be worth paying for in the PlayStation era.



Fifth-Generation iPod

"Think silver," we've heard. If the grapevine is trustworthy, Apple's new full-sized iPod (artist's rendering above) will have the scratch-resistant aluminum body of an iPod mini, come in multiple colors (including silver), and include a color screen. Substantial music and non-music feature improvements are apparently planned, possibly the wireless and gaming features noted on this page. After lackluster sales of expensive iPod photo hardware, video functionality remains a huge question mark, and may wind up in an entirely separate product. It's also possible that the iPod's face won't have quite the same screen and control orientation, either.



Bluetooth Wireless

The revolution was supposed to start years ago: one wireless Bluetooth headset could work with your cell phone, car, computer, and portable music device, and your music device could talk with your car, computer and phone. But few companies have supported the standard. Apple has been trying to change that, offering Bluetooth in its desktop computers and even mandating cutting-edge Bluetooth 2.0+EDR hardware in its PowerBook laptops. Similarly, wireless Bluetooth headphones are getting better, but are still on the large side and have only average audio quality. If Apple keeps pushing forward, we may see quality improve this year, and if comments from an automotive product manager at Apple's partner Motorola prove accurate, the iPod will benefit.



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What do iPodlounge readers do with their iPods? Some listen quietly for new musical trends. Others blare songs at their neighbors. A few read the news on their tiny screens. And they're all happily, entirely hooked.

alan wegrzyn

Location: Palatine, Illinois
Age: 19
iPods Owned: 40GB 3rd Generation



When I first received the iPod, literally the first thing I thought was: "I wonder if I can make this do more stuff than it can...." So for about nine months, I was dumping music, syncing it to RSS feeds, anything imagined except iPod Linux (sorry guys).

Then I realized that, well, I don't need those. I mean I like having my text games, and reading the news, but really I was trying to turn my iPod into a PDA.

I decided that instead of investing all this time into trying to change the iPod into something its not, I was

just going to let it do what it does best. Play music.

I do still keep notes on it, and sync news feeds, but it's nothing like before, when it took 10-15 mins to sync everything (Calender, Notes, etc.). Now it's two minutes and I'm out the door.

Theres something about simply being able to listen to music that I like. A simplicity if you will. I'm not trying to get all zen, but I just like to keep my iPod as a music player first and foremost. Thats why I received it, to bring my music with me everywhere I go.

billi (b.j.) kiefer

Location: Cumberland, Maryland
Age: 29
iPods Owned: 30GB 3rd-Generation, 10GB 1st Generation

My iPod is an every day part of my life. I work as a rural mail carrier, and some days, I spent eight hours in my Jeep with no other company than the radio. Local radio stations have not bothered to update their playlists since 1988, and the only talk stations carry strict far-right programming. My customers appreciate hearing me before they

see me. With the iPod's loud techno and cool old favorites announcing my arrival on their roads, they scurry to their mailboxes to send out last minute bills and pick up checks.

I carry roughly 15 GB in audiobooks and college lectures, another 6 GB in music, a copy of my fiance's thesis, and various newsbits from iPod Agent. My and my daughter's iPods have made the miles fly through a cross country trip with our New Beetle group to Roswell NM, carried files from my home PC to my fiance's computer in Williamsburg, and

served as alarm clocks on all night, sleep in the car roadtrips.

One time, while driving in our New Beetle, we were podflashed by an entire SUV full of 4th Gen owners. The "song of the open road" took on a whole new dimension for us.



kristiano ang

Location: Singapore
Age: 14
iPods Owned: iPod mini 4GB

As a student and publisher of Vainquer Teens Magazine (www.vainquer.net), the iPod has influenced my way of life. My iPod mini enables me to cart around 1,000 songs at a go and has enhanced my taste in music. Before the iPod, I revolved around pop

music. Now, I listen to all kinds of music (rock, alternative) because I simply don't have enough pop!

Additionally, being in touch with popular culture is particularly important to me as a magazine publisher. The iPod lets me experience a wave of coolness developing first hand. And as I listen to Podcasts all the time, my mates wonder why I suddenly burst out in laughter whilst listening to music.

How do iPodlounge editors use their iPods? From homes and offices to cars and schools, iPodlounge's editors find ways to carry their music and favorite add-ons everywhere they go. Here are a few of our stories.

jeremy horwitz, editor-in-chief

Location: Irvine, California
Age: 29
iPods Owned: Most of them, from 1st Generation to iPod photo



If I'm carrying an iPod, it's almost always the 60GB iPod photo unless I'm in the middle of testing an add-on specific to another model. The iPod photo lets me carry my entire music library without compromises, and stores my photos, too. I love the color screen, but I really use the iPod almost entirely for music.

My current case of choice is Power Support's Silicone Jacket with 3D Wheel Film and Crystal Film, but I love the company's Square Type iPod mini case even more. And most of the time, my iPod's wearing the case I'm in the middle of testing.

Up until recently, I wore my Etymotic ER-4Ps everywhere, but used my Ultimate Ears UE-10 Pros at home. Now I'm playing with Shure's E5cs a lot, and dock my iPod in an Apple

iPod photo Dock to connect to a set of speakers. Right now they're hooked up to Altec Lansing FX6021s, but I occasionally connect them wirelessly using an AirPort Express to a glass and metal set of Celestion AVF302 speakers in my living room.

On the road, I use Belkin's Auto Kit, a Sony CPA-9C cassette adapter, and a Pro Clip padded mount in my car. Next step: a line-in kit.

larry angell, news editor

Just recently my iPod shuffle overtook my 60GB iPod photo as the most used iPod I own. Lately, I just don't have the time or feel the need to dig through 15,000 songs to find the five or six I want to hear before I get done cleaning the office, getting the car's oil changed or whatever. I'll be getting a HelixiPod aluminum case for it very soon.

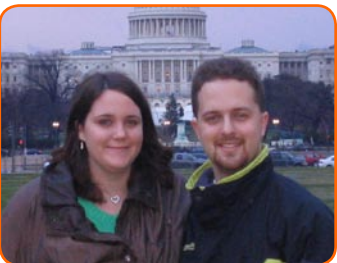


My iPod photo does tend to get more use in the car. Because my Jetta likes to eat cassette adapters, I use the new Kensington FM transmitter, which connects via the Dock Connector port (so it won't work with Mr. shuffle). The iPod photo gets special treatment when it comes to protection. He's had a vast wardrobe of different cases. Right now I'm really digging the Incase leather Argyle case.

Location: Wheelersburg, Ohio
Age: 25
iPods Owned: Every Generation

At home, my iPods are usually asleep, as I use my TiVo box to stream music wirelessly from iTunes to my living room setup.

jerrod hofferth, contributing editor



I usually keep my 4G iPod in my Contour Showcase. Having so much storage space allows me to manage my wild assortment of music and keep my entire library at my fingertips whether I'm at home, in the car, or out and about. In addition, it also serves as a backup hard drive, storing an exact mirror of my entire MacOS X User Home directory!

As a busy university student and commuter, I end up spending the most time with my iPod in the car - almost two hours a day!

I use a Belkin Auto Kit, Sony CPA-9C cassette adapter, and for now, no mount: my iPod fits nicely into a tray in my center console.

I also do a good amount of listening around campus. Whether I'm trying to block out noise in order to study or simply to get better sound, I use my Shure E2C Isolating Earphones. These are a low/mid-range set of in-canal phones that offer superb sound quality for the buck.

My Home Setup: iTunes to my home stereo via an AirPort Express base station. If I'm iPodding, I use my Grado SR-60 open-ear headphones, which sound great for only \$70. Since I'm a student, I'm on a budget and need to spend my cash wisely.

Location: Gilbert, Arizona
Age: 21
iPods Owned: iPod 40GB 4th Generation, iPod shuffle 512MB

Sneak Peeks

The future of the iPod starts here: iPodlounge's first looks at tomorrow's incredible new accessories. But remember to wait for our graded reviews before rushing out to the store - final features and performance may vary.

Gadgets. Yes, the iPod plays back pre-recorded digital music files. But with these creative add-ons, it will soon be doing far more: radio tuning, movie playback, and enhanced digital photo storage are all on tap, and soon.



BTI The iPod Tunestir: FM Radio Tuner, Transmitter, and Remote Control

If asked what one major feature the iPod is missing by comparison with its competitors, most people would answer "a radio." So with ten million radio-less iPods in the marketplace, Battery Technology Incorporated has come up with The iPod Tunestir (\$69.95) - their spelling, not ours - a single-corded accessory that digitally tunes FM radio, acts as an iPod FM transmitter, and also serves as a complete iPod remote control. A five-station memory makes tuning and broadcasting easy. Expect Tunestir to be available and widely sought-after in early May.

Nyko Movie Player

If you want to make a splash in the iPod market, add something staggering to the iPod's already robust feature set and promise that it will work with ease. That's how video game accessory maker Nyko stunned pretty much every established iPod add-on designer with the Movie Player (est. \$249.99), a flip-up color video screen, two-speaker set, and DVD-style movie control pad for your iPod.

Nyko's 3.5" screen has a substantially larger footprint than even the iPod photo's clean 2" display, and uses its own video processing hardware to process movies stored on any docking iPod's hard drive. Photo playback capability is also supported; movies and pictures are run through free PC or Mac software provided by Nyko with the Movie Player.

Contacted before press time, Nyko told iPodlounge that the casing depicted here is being changed for the product's final version, due around Summer of this year. Will Apple have a video player of its own by then? Probably not, but who knows come the holidays...



Nyko iTop Button Relocator

Some people will "get it," other people won't. Nyko's iTop Button Relocator (\$19.99) was made for people who carry their third- or fourth-generation iPods in pockets or sheaths that cover up the Click Wheel controller. (It also works with, but doesn't physically match, the iPod mini.) Glassine buttons for volume, play/pause, track forward and backward, the Hold switch and a headphone port all appear together in a row on a chrome and plastic casing that nicely matches full-sized iPods. No battery is required.



MacMice JamPod



Guitar karaoke, anyone? MacMice claims that its JamPod (\$29.99) will let electric guitarists mix their handiwork with whatever's playing on an iPod or iPod mini - a novelty for some, but an opportunity for others to cheaply practice alongside tracks they've heard or recorded themselves. Instead of a guitar, you can alternately mix in any other audio source, blending the iPod's audio stream with another device to make a

simple mix. There's a headphone jack and a volume knob on the top for easy listening or recording. While it's not the coolest-looking or most necessary iPod accessory, we're still looking forward to checking it out before its April release.

TimeTrax DockTrax

Okay, it's large and looks sort of like a computer peripheral from the 80's or 90's, but it's unique: DockTrax (\$199.99) captures satellite radio broadcasts and turns them into iPod-compatible MP3 files. The initial price gets you the pictured dock station, a XM Direct Radio receiver, an antenna and software for a Windows XP PC. (A Sirius Satellite compatible version is in the works as well.) TimeTrax only guarantees compatibility with fourth-generation iPods, and no release date is known.



Apple iPod Camera Connector



Photographers have griped for months that the iPod photo's good at displaying photos, but mediocre for storing them. Gripe no more. Apple's iPod Camera Connector (\$29) lets you connect virtually any digital camera made in the last two years directly to the bottom of an iPod photo, and with one or two button presses transfer

all of its photographs automatically to the iPod's hard disk. Better yet, you can view all of your photos immediately on the iPod photo's color screen. If you prefer not to drain your camera's battery, carry around your USB-equipped media card reader instead. If this works as well as Apple suggests, we'll be thrilled, and it should be in stores any day now.

DLO VoiceNote

If you've passed on Griffin's iTalk or Belkin's Voice Recorder for third- and fourth-generation iPods and iPod photos, you might want to take a look at DLO's VoiceNote (\$39.99) voice recorder. Unlike its competitors, VoiceNote includes both a detachable lapel microphone and a built-in microphone, and DLO promises the ability to adjust audio level settings directly on the iPod without additional software. As with the earlier recorders, you can use the built-in speaker to listen to iPod-based recordings, or transfer them to iTunes to listen on your computer.



Wireless. From Bluetooth transmitters and receivers to new wireless headphones and remote controls, the days of the iPod's dangling white cords may be numbered. But what does Apple have planned? Here's what we know.

Griffin Technology BlueTrip

Two flavors of Bluetooth wireless devices for the iPod are now making the rounds: portable solutions for on-the-go listening, and stationary versions for in-home or in-office use. Griffin's BlueTrip (\$149.99) turns your iPod into a Bluetooth-based broadcasting station, sending its contents to a receiver that connects to your existing home stereo system. The lure is "iPod as ultimate music remote control," with a 30-foot broadcast distance between the transmitter and receiver components. RCA stereo jacks and an optical output are both provided on the receiver, and Griffin promises CD-quality sound output, which if accurate would best previously released Bluetooth devices - and upcoming competitors.



Belkin TuneStage



Belkin's TuneStage (\$169.99) is cut from the same cloth as the BlueTrip, but was announced earlier and features receiver and transmitter components that resemble Apple's aluminum and plastic iPod mini and Mac mini hardware. While Belkin hasn't guaranteed CD-quality sound or the optical audio output that would typically accompany such high audio quality, it has been forthcoming regarding Bluetooth's broadcast quality limitations and suggested that TuneStage's performance will satisfy most people. It sounded great in our brief tests at a noisy convention center, but we'll reserve final judgment until we have a chance to do a full review.



hp Bluetooth Headphones

One of the most promising applications of Bluetooth technology is already available for purchase: the wireless headphone. We've already reviewed Bluetake's clunky i-Phono set for the iPod, but Hewlett-Packard's new Bluetooth Headphones (\$99.99) are lighter, simpler, and less bizarre looking. The headphones can be paired with HP's handheld computers, as well as TEN Technology's naviPlay portable Bluetooth solution, which offers them in an \$239.99 combo bundle. The only issue: none of the current headphone solutions uses the new and improved Bluetooth 2.0 standard, so while these headphones are compatible with existing products, they won't get the most out of tomorrow's better-sounding Bluetooth accessories.

Apple: the wireless wildcard

What sort of wireless plans does Apple have for the iPod? Here are the clues - there are still no definitive answers quite yet.

In April 2003, Apple filed for a patent on wireless media player technology, including a sketch of an antenna-equipped iPod.

In July 2004, Apple announced a deal with Motorola to bring iTunes to the company's next-generation cell phones.

In August 2004, the company publicly searched for at least two Bluetooth and wi-fi (802.11b/g) experts to hire for team iPod.

In February 2005, a Motorola product manager said Apple would release iPods with Bluetooth technology. Apple did not respond.

Griffin Technology AirClick



Current iPod remote controls have several limitations, the most annoying of which is that they don't work from much of a distance. Apple's wired Remote is fine, and TEN's naviPod/naviPro series of infrared remotes work pretty well, but Griffin's engineered a better solution: RF broadcasting. Unlike the others, Griffin's AirClick (\$39.99) promises to work even if you're separated from your iPod by 60 feet of distance - twice that of the best infrared controllers. The prototype we've tested goes through walls without an issue, controlling iPods several rooms away. And Griffin will also offer AirClick receivers that fit computers and smaller iPod minis. Our prototype USB dongle let us control DVD playback, Keynote, iTunes, PowerPoint, Quicktime, the RadioSHARK, and more. Exciting stuff, for sure.

Pacific Rim Tech Mobility BT700



While TEN Technology went with a premium Bluetooth wireless solution for the naviPlay, Pacific Rim Technologies is offering a simpler, cheaper alternative in the Mobility BT700 (\$129.99). Attach the small headphone jack dongle to your iPod, unfold the headphones, and you're ready to rock without cords. The Mobility solution also works with devices other than the iPod, though it'll prove especially popular as a low-cost way to hide your iPod in a bag (or anything 30-feet away) while continuing to listen. You can't control your iPod's playback wirelessly, but if you have a good playlist or don't mind randomized listening, it's an affordable possibility.



Macally BlueWave

If small earphones aren't your thing, Macally's BlueWave (\$169.99) may be more to your liking than the Mobility BT700. BlueWave includes a top-mounting iPod transmitter and a black-and-silver set of full-sized earcups that fold up for easier storage. Macally promises 48-hour battery life off of two AAA batteries, plus compatibility with Bluetooth-equipped computers. You can even connect a wire to the headphones if you prefer to make an old-fashioned connection to your iPod or stereo system. Volume's adjustable on the headphones, so you won't need to play with your iPod once it's stored away.

Etymotic Research Wireless Headphones

One of the world's very best makers of headphones is Etymotic Research, which scored iPodlounge's top overall rating last year for its ER-4 series headphones. Following up on the success of its white and clear iPod-specific ER-6i Isolators, Etymotic informed iPodlounge that it's now working on a pair of wireless headphones for mid- to late-2005 release, and promises the same superb audio quality we've heard in its other products. In our experience, when Etymotic promises quality, they deliver, so we cannot wait to see what they turn out. The company is also working on a \$100 pair of wired headphones, but refuses to release them until it can guarantee quality that won't tarnish the company's stellar brand name.



What about Motorola's wireless iPhone?

Apple's been working on iTunes-compatible phones with Motorola, but release dates and physical designs remain question marks. It's known that there's an iTunes-compatible cell phone called ROKR, featuring an interface that resembles the iPod photo's, and other iTunes phones are supposed to follow. But Motorola abruptly cancelled ROKR's February public debut, suggesting that Apple prefers not to show it until it's ready to go on sale. No one knows when that will be.

Wired Headphones and Speakers. Traditional listening devices have been updated in untraditional new packages just for iPod fans. High-end and low-end products offer more choices than ever.

Shure E4c Earphones

The chrome, white, and gray look of the E4cs are no accident: it's part of a plan. People already love Shure's E2c, E3c, and E5c headphones, but there hasn't been an E4c. Now there is. Planned for a \$300 price point, the E4c promises to deliver virtually the same clean audio as the company's \$500 E5cs, but with added bass and thump to appeal to the tastes of mainstream listeners - read: typical iPod fans. While the E4cs cost as much as a 20GB iPod, they're designed to be the "perfect gift" for that special someone who wants a big step up from Apple's stock earbuds. We've tested prototypes of the E4cs and found them impressive, especially given that they are physically substantially less noticeable in your ears than the E5cs we liked, and don't require you to wear the cords around the backs of your ears. These could be big for iPod lovers when they're released in May - Etymotic's true ER-4 competitor.



Audio-Technica ATH-CM3 Earphones

Developed primarily for Japanese consumers, Audio-Technica's ATH-CM3 Stick Inner Ear Earphones (\$59, imported) were released to capitalize on demand for the first-generation iPod mini. Versions roughly paralleling Apple's original five colors were released, and go just as well with the newer mini models. As with Apple's white iPod earbuds, don't expect tremendous bass response, but you'll love the style.



Battery-powered amplifiers

There are dozens of earbuds that will fit the iPod and meet its electrical requirements, but if you want to use low-efficiency headphones, two companies are providing iPod-matching amplifiers powered by external batteries. Boostaroo Revolution (\$79.95, pictured) doubles volume, adds 3-D effects to sound, and includes an audio splitter. We've also reviewed Simpl Acoustics' A1 amplifier (\$149) on our web site. Our advice: stick to iPod-friendly phones.



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Fujitsu Ten Eclipse Speakers

Filed under "amazing looking speakers, if you can afford them:" Japan's Fujitsu Ten came up with these interesting Eclipse TD 307 speakers (\$500), sold in sets of two tripod-equipped satellites and accompanied by a uniquely stylish metal amplifier. Thirty Watts of output power are available for each of the two channels; the chrome part at the top is the volume knob. White, black, and silver versions are available.

The company also makes a mammoth tubular subwoofer called the 316SW (\$1199) that adds considerable bass to the system and promises low distortion. And that's not a typo.



Nyko Speaker Dock

Small, inexpensive, and well-built, Nyko's Speaker Dock (\$49.99) is a desktop iPod charging cradle with two speakers built in for stereo listening. Designed to match the full-sized fourth-generation iPod, it's also compatible with earlier third-generation models and iPod minis. How does it sound? "Really great for a device of its size," says a Nyko representative. We're looking forward to seeing what a little system like this one can do. It's planned for a Spring release.



Klipsch iFi

You've seen the full-system photo earlier in the Buyers' Guide, but here are some alternate views of the components in Klipsch's iFi (\$399), a high-end audio system customized for the iPod. Klipsch has changed the casing colors for a set of its reference-grade RSX-3 satellite speakers (shown in original black above), then coupled them with a huge woofer for earth-shaking low-frequency output. There's also an illuminated matching iPod dock and wireless remote. As all speaker makers are indicating, Klipsch's choice of silver rather than white as a color is intended to best match current and future iPod products. The company's cheaper multimedia ProMedia Ultra 2.0 speakers (right) will be sold in silver, too.

Other options big & small

We play with lots of other speakers at iPodlounge, but they'll appear only on our Backstage page unless they were designed to match the iPod. Klipsch's ProMedia Ultra 2.0 (\$99, below) system was released last year in black, which only matched Apple's limited edition U2 iPod, and didn't include a docking system of any sort. But it sounds pretty good considering that it doesn't have a subwoofer, and works equally well with iPods, PCs and Macs when used with their headphone jacks. Color aside, serious audio fans will hold out for the company's iPod-dedicated iFi system (left), even though it's four times the price.



In-Car Accessories. Apple's focusing heavily on high-end solutions for high-end automobiles, but independent third-party accessory makers are creating iPod-to-car equipment for "the rest of us." How much will you spend?



Apple's New Car Partnerships

While third-party developers have worked aggressively to develop in-car integration solutions that work with many of the world's most popular makes and models, Apple Computer has tip-toed in the automotive market. It flirted briefly with Volkswagen in a co-promotion of the iPod and New Beetle, then worked with BMW on a BMW iPod Adapter cable (\$149) that let certain new BMW and Mini Cooper vehicles' stereo buttons control iPods. These were great prestige deals for Apple and fans of a few European brands, but what about everyone else's cars?

In January, Apple announced deals with another small slate of car manufacturers for iPod integration kits: Mercedes-Benz, Volvo, Alfa Romeo, Ferrari, Nissan and Toyota's Scion label are now working with the company on products. Unfortunately, "iPod integration" is not consistently implemented across Apple's offerings, in some cars including a text screen display of iPod track information and menus, in others nothing more than a cable that delivers clear sound and lets you switch tracks. There's no word on which features will be available in Volvo's iPod Adapter, due second-quarter 2005, or the yet-to-be disclosed offerings from the other car companies, either. Ferrari, if you're listening, we're ready for a test drive.

Mercedes-Benz iPod Integration Kit



The most conspicuous new Apple car partner is Mercedes-Benz, which will debut its iPod Integration Kit (\$299) in the redesigned 2006 M-Class car and roll it out in other 2005 and 2006 vehicles thereafter. Mercedes' implementation looks to go a step beyond BMW's, which offered no track information and required you to create iTunes playlists to listen to iPod tracks. A two-line display with navigation arrows permits you to scroll through the iPod's menus and tracks using steering wheel-based controls. You'll just need to peer through your steering wheel to see it. No word on why the iPod integration wasn't included in the separate GPS screen to the right, or whether these features vary from Benz to Benz.

Alfa Romeo 147 iPod kit



Alfa's 147 model vehicles implement iPod integration with two sets of buttons (steering wheel and stereo mounted) to control tracks forward/backward and volume. There's a center console slot that can hold Apple's music player - look for the black hole above the iPod mini in the second shot above to see where an iPod slides in. Pricing is still unknown.

Dension ice>Link Plus, MOST-Link: iPod, and Screen-Link: iPod

One of the first companies to develop a high-end iPod car integration system was Dension, creator of both the Ice>Link 1.0 and 1.1 car solutions. Now Dension has shown Ice>Link Plus (\$199), which lets both your iPod and car stereo simultaneously control iPod in-car playback - no easy feat - and displays track and artist information on compatible car stereo screens. An iPod mounting cradle is also included. Unlike Apple's solutions, Ice>Link Plus boasts compatibility across a wide variety of popular vehicle lines (Audi, BMW, Chrysler, Ford, GM, Honda/Acura, Jaguar, Land Rover, Mazda, Mercedes, Porsche, Saab, Volkswagen and Volvo), and works with aftermarket stereo components, too.

The company's upcoming MOST-Link (\$399) provides an iPod interface to recent vehicles with the emerging MOST fiber optic standard connection system, while Screen-Link transfers over track and control functionality to an in-car screen. Dension promises Screen-Link will include a browser with album artwork and ID3 tag information, with a second-quarter 2004 release, but hasn't yet released price information.



Clarion EA1251B CNet iPod Interface and iPod Cable for VRX755VD

Impress Apple, get invited to show off at a trade show. That's what aftermarket car stereo maker Clarion told us happened when it first demonstrated the iPod cable (\$59.99) for its premium VRX755VD touchscreen-based DVD and CD player (\$1599.99). The system enables mounting or hiding of the iPod in one location while its buttons and display are partially replicated (track, album, and artist information, plus simple menus) on the integrated touchscreen. Though radically more expensive than any other system we've seen - and still a hint glitchy in displaying "smart quotes" and certain other characters in track names - the VRX755VD undoubtedly looks better than any of the other in-car iPod integration options we've tested.

Clarion is also preparing the EA1251B iPod Interface, which will integrate with all of the company's current model CNet stereos, permitting them to control the iPod and display simple track and artist information. A mid-2005 launch is planned, and though pricing isn't yet available, the Interface and its affiliated stereos will together be considerably less expensive than the overall VRX755VD package - likely \$300 and up, packaged together.





Griffin Technology iTripLCD

If a photo's worth a thousand words, we think the one above pretty much says it all. Griffin's iTrips for various iPods have been amongst the most popular FM transmitters ever made. Originally hailed as brilliant for their sleek bodies and smart use of the iPod's LCD screen for tuning, the iTrips have recently been surpassed in ease-of-tuning by newer competitors. Due for an early July 2005 launch, iTripLCD features an easy tuning knob (right) and an integrated LCD screen, plus the sleek form factor people have known and loved. Pricing is yet unknown, but should be under \$50.

MacMice PodBuddy and FM

Stylistically only one step shy of the iPod holy grail we've been looking for, MacMice's new PodBuddy FM (\$99.99) uses a gooseneck arm to mount and charge your full-sized iPod, plus a FM transmitter or line out port to broadcast tunes to your car radio. Shown in standard white and "Limited Edition" black, the PodBuddy FM is planned for an April release. A non-FM version (\$69.99) will leave off the FM transmitter. MacMice promises that both versions will use a more sturdy iPod mount than competing products, which haven't supported full-sized iPods because of steadiness concerns.



Griffin Technology SmartDeck

One of the most significant new products shown for the iPod in recent months is Griffin Technology's SmartDeck (\$24.99), the first cassette tape adapter that also allows any car's stereo to control the buttons of an iPod or iPod mini. Finally, car owners with steering wheel track forward and backward controls will be able to use them to control the iPod without a \$150 in-car kit. Audio quality? Griffin promises that it will rival or exceed Sony's CPA-9C, our top-rated iPod cassette adapter accessory. The only drawback: you'll need to use the iPod's headphone port for audio output, rather than drawing a signal from the iPod's bottom Dock Connector port.



Xtrememac AirPlay for iPod shuffle

If you've heard of Xtrememac's original AirPlay FM transmitter (iPodlounge rating: A), you know why we're excited about the company's upcoming version for the iPod shuffle (\$49.99), which amazingly enough includes even more functionality than its predecessor. While we can't evaluate its transmission performance until we've actually tried it, we do know that AirPlay for iPod shuffle includes three preset channel buttons in addition to its up and down tuning buttons, as well as a full car charging solution that powers both the AirPlay and the iPod shuffle on the road.

But can you use it outside of a car, like Belkin's already-released TuneCast II (iPodlounge rating: B+)? XtremeMac's site suggests that the answer is yes, stating that it can be used on any FM radio. We're anxious to put our hands on this one - based on XtremeMac's track record, there's good reason to believe that it'll be worth checking out.



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Cases. Silicone rubber cases topped last year's charts, but fabric, leather, and metal case makers have come back with stylish and usable new designs. Some of our favorite upcoming iPod, mini, and shuffle cases are featured here.



Belkin NE Fashion Cases

Best known for its car, battery, and multimedia iPod accessories, Belkin is taking a bigger and better stab at the iPod case market with newly fashionable leather, fabric, and rubber designs. The NE Case series (\$29-39) features iPod wallets, Speed Racer-influenced leather sheaths with racing stripes, and other intriguing concepts are in the offing.



Crumpler iPod Cases

Australian bag maker Crumpler entered the iPod market with colorful and distinctively sack-like fabric John Thursday cases (\$19.99 and up) that just happened to match their colorful and distinctively sack-like armbags and backpacks. Different fabrics, colors, and sizes caught and held our attention.

Looking for other cool iPod cases? We've reorganized our case reviews in the Buyers' Guide so that it's easier to find the best cases for each specific iPod. Since there are literally hundreds of cases on the market right now, and more coming out every day, we're highlighting only the ones we find most worthy of coverage. We sometimes receive cases that fall apart, don't pay especially good attention to small but important details, or come from companies with questionable customer service or other business practices. Don't expect to find them in the Buyers' Guide, or on our site.

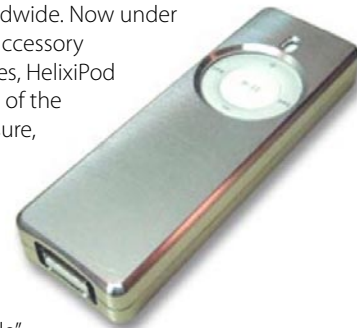


Sumo iPod Cases

Some of the coolest fabric iPod cases we've seen are being released by upstart design house Sumo, which splinted off of San Francisco-based messenger bag maker Timbuk2. The cases (\$19.99) use resilient external materials and interesting stitching to create padded textures and looks unlike any iPod cases we've seen. Their insides are Lycra-lined for iPod protection. Our only problem: finding them. They're available, but take some searching. We found these at the Marin Mac Shop, and the company's web site (sumocases.com) now lists them as available at CompUSA, as well. We'd definitely advise fabric case fans to make the extra effort to check these out.

HelixiPod Aluminum Case (name subject to change)

We thought metal cases were cool when we saw Matias' iPod Armor, but when iPodlounge forum member HelixiPod programmed his computer-controlled aluminum milling machine to encase his iPod shuffle, he set off ripples in design shops worldwide. Now under contract with a major iPod accessory vendor to distribute the cases, HelixiPod is producing multiple colors of the machined aluminum enclosure, which does away with the shuffle's USB endcap and uses four screws to hold itself together. Versions for all full-sized iPods are also underway. Price tag? \$30-40. As Jeff "the Dude" Lebowski once said, we're just gonna go find a cash machine...



Incase iPod Fashion Cases

Incase's new iPod fashion cases and wallets are young, hip, and simple: made from leather and/or fabric, the cases are like Apple's old iPod pack-in sheaths, while the wallets flip open and use zippers or rubberized straps to hold closed. The different wallets in particular are a welcome feminizing step away from the PDA-style leather cases we've been seeing for so long.

Graphics vary from case to case: the Dinopod line features the images of dinosaurs, comically labelled with their names ("Tyrannosarus Rex"), while the Crest line features crests and fleur de lis, and the Argyle line uses argyle patterns. All use one- or two-color printing on a different colored background, with stitching and embossing in some cases accentuating the patterns. Several of iPodlounge's editors are seriously excited about all of the designs, which Incase will sell primarily through urban boutiques.

iSkin eXo 2 Custom, Duo, and Shuffle Cases

Canadian case maker iSkin has major innovations on tap. Its branded rubber cases for popular bands and sports teams include full iPod protection and Click Wheel covers; the new two-tone rubber and metal iSkin Duo will feature a superior belt clip, and the iSkin shuffle's a uniquely detailed casing for the smallest iPod on the block. Prices aren't set.



Better Energy Systems Tread Recycled Cases

Environmentalism may have had its heyday in the 1990's, but don't tell Better Energy Systems. After designing the iPod solar charger Solio, U.K.-based BES came up with Tread - iPod cases made from recycled rubber, specifically taken from the treads of car tires found in South American dumps. The cases were some of the most urban-appropriate we've seen, and are promised to be individually unique. A Solio-fitting version was shown, too, for true eco-warriors. Expect prices under \$40 per case.



Music!

The iPod's easy on the eyes, but it was made for your ears. We show you the best sites for music downloads and global iPod parties.

How to get free music for your iPod. MP3 download services are numerous, but rarely legal. Here are the safe ones.

If you haven't yet filled your iPod to capacity, you're probably either trying to do so, or praying that it doesn't happen too soon. For those seeking more tunes, there's good news: we can point you in the direction of some great free music.

When it comes to finding free music on the Internet, there are legal and safe options, as well as illegal and unsafe options. You've probably already heard about illegal Internet music downloads, but just in case you haven't, we'll run through the reasons you'll want to skip them and use the legal free music sites instead.

Illegal Free Music: Downloads with Consequences

Six years ago, the sheer quantity of open challenges to American copyright law created a popular perception that music - old and new alike - was supposed to be free, and "shared" between friends and strangers. Upon release of just about any new album (and sometimes even before), full MP3-format tracks appeared on music-sharing services such as Napster and Kazaa, spreading around the world without restriction. Many recording artists were angered by what they felt was mass theft of their music, while others either ignored or embraced the file-sharing.

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) decided to fight the "music is free" movement, undertaking highly publicized lawsuits on behalf of artists it represented. Services such as Napster were sued for billions of dollars as facilitators of copyright infringement, and either driven out of business or forced into retreat. Subsequently, RIAA lawsuits against individuals shut down large resources of "shared" music, and warned others that swapping smaller quantities of copyrighted content could subject them to similar legal action.

RIAA lawsuits haven't stopped the trading of copyrighted music online, but they've turned file-sharing into a game of Russian Roulette. For obvious reasons, iPodlounge does not recommend the sharing or downloading of "free" music from file-sharing services unless you know for sure that the artist has specifically given permission for that music to be shared.

Downloading Free Music Without Fear

While we acknowledge that some of these fears that may not be entirely justified, the RIAA's litigation strategy has caused many people to question whether any music they download for free is safe. Today, there are only a handful of major free music download sites that guarantee that their users are not breaking any laws. The list that follows includes some of the best ones we've seen.

Amazon.com Free Music Downloads: A surprising mix of music from mainstream and independent artists, available for free in iPod-compatible MP3 format.



Plays for Sure? No.



If we can count on Microsoft for anything these days, we'd expect empty promises that its hardware or software are guaranteed to work properly. The company's new PlaysForSure logo (above) tacitly acknowledges that thousands of users of Microsoft's older music products could never figure out if songs they were downloading would actually play on the hardware they purchased. Now all you need to do is buy new hardware with the new logo, and you're all set. For now.

But PlaysForSure music downloads are sure not to play on the world's most popular players: Apple's iPods. Keep up the great work, Microsoft!

eMusic.com: Provides a paid MP3 download service with a free two-week trial period. Focuses primarily on independent artists and offers a selection of 20,000 full albums to choose from.

Epitonic.com: Offers highly professional, artist-focused presentation of free digital music downloads in MP3 format, with biographical details and short previews for songs across a narrow collection of genres.

Freekidsmusic.com: Along with its sister site Freechildrensmusic.com, provides a large variety of free MP3 format songs for young listeners.

IUMA.com: The Internet Underground Music Archive provides genre-organized downloads of iPod-compatible MP3-format music.

MFiles.co.uk: A simple site from an aesthetic standpoint, provides free downloads of well-known classical music in MP3 format.

MP34U.com: A clean, professionally designed interface to individual free songs sorted by genre, selected by site "sources" who pick and post only music they like.

Music.download.com: The music-dedicated expansion of popular software download site Download.com offers free full-length MP3 songs across all major genres, even including Children's, Spoken Word, Comedy, Folk and Religious tracks. Most tracks are indie.

PureVolume.com offers over 100,000 free songs for download, and captured many of the best users of what used to be MP3.com (before it was scrapped, sold, and completely changed).

Of course, if you can't find the song you're looking for on one of these free sites, you can always visit Apple's iTunes Music Store and make a purchase there. Though iTunes isn't as cheap as some of the questionable international sites listed in the prior section, and it both limits bitrate quality and places heavier restrictions on use of its downloaded music, it is an entirely safe and legal way to get access to over one million songs.

Downloading Free Podcasts: Talk Radio for your iPod

In addition to free music for your iPod, you can also download "Podcasts," short radio-style programs produced by individuals and companies around the world. **iPodder.org** is the site of former MTV vee-jay and Podcasting spearheader Adam Curry, with a directory that's slowly being updated to accommodate numerous additions. **Podcaster.net** is another and more modern-looking directory, while **iPodderX.com** offers both a directory and a Podcast downloading tool.

iPodlounge.com has even produced its own free Podcasts - which are made using actual iPods equipped with Griffin's iTalk Voice Recorder. Check them out at **iPodlounge.com/podcasts**.

Finding More Free and Legal Music Online

If you haven't visited iPodlounge.com's Free Music section yet, take a look. Our site has live web links to all of the free music sites mentioned above, and more. You can also check out the iPodlounge Discussion Forums, which host over 15,000 posts on music (and 3,000 on music formats), including the Free Music forum, where you can discuss legal places to find free music online.

Be careful, though. iPodlounge does not take any responsibility for verifying the legality of any of the sites or services listed, and encourages all users to be cautious before downloading and sharing any other person's music online.

Great Music Blogs



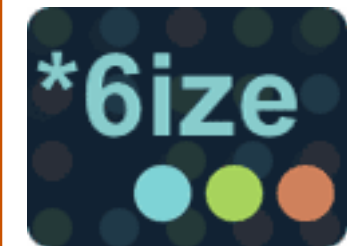
3hive.com

3hive's team of five music reviewers cover every genre under the sun, with a fair bit of electronic, pop, experimental, folk, and rock music.



stylusmagazine.com/ipod

Stylus Magazine covers a wide variety of major and indie artists spanning genres from rock to rap, dance to country.



sixeyes.blogspot.com

Alan W. at *6ize covers cutting edge indie music with the occasional foray into reggae, country, folk, and jazz.

iPod parties. They started in New York; now they've sprung up all over the world. Learn how communities of iPod lovers have joined together and danced to the short playlists of amateur DJs. Then see the future of MP3DJs.



**iParty with Andrew Andrew.
The world's first iPod party?**

New York City's Andrew Andrew DJ - a two-man DJ team - is credited with starting the iParty craze. Every Tuesday night, two iPods were loaded with over 1,000 songs, and partygoers were given the chance to DJ using a mixing table to switch between the iPods. Andrew Andrew provided a list of songs, set up tickets and a Now Serving sign, and helped people learn how to use the iPods and mixer to impress the crowd. Every DJ was given seven minutes that counted down on a large clock in front of the mixing tables. It was a hit; clones appeared, and iParty even spread to The Townhouse Hotel in Miami Beach.

**R U Gonna B My D.J.
Australia's top iPod
party grows weekly.**



The bad news: "we started the iParty with Andrew Andrew thing almost 3 years ago and we now feel like it is time to move on," one Andrew told iPodlounge. But they "really like the shuffle," and still DJ with iPods. Learn more about the guys at andrewandrewdotcom.com. (Yes, the address is correct.)

Every Friday night, Hugh Waters (aka DJ Streetparty) presides over Australia's best-known iPod party, "R U Gonna B My D.J.," six hours of iPod turntablism that start at 9PM and go until way early in the morning. Turnout is on the increase, ranging from 50-200 people per night. Melbourne club Bourgie hosts the parties weekly, up from once every two weeks last year.

"There are some books lying around the bar with lists of all the songs stored on the iPods," Waters told iPodlounge. Patrons take a ticket, pick two songs from Streetparty's list of 9500 songs, and come up to a DJ booth to program two iPods and a mixer. With the shortest playlists of any party we've seen, it's obvious that the emphasis is on quality, not quantity. "Lately more and more people are coming in with their own iPods and playlists prepared," Waters noted, and people "become much more confident about getting behind the iPods after they have downed a couple of iLongecks."

**Playlist Club. Now London's
calling the United States.**

Since its August 2004 debut, admission has been free. You get 15 minutes to rock the house with your DJ skills. If you want, bring your own iPod and your own playlist. There are judges. And prizes. It's Playlist Club, where the first rule is: tell your friends about Playlist Club.

"The moment we knew we were onto something was our first night," Playlist's Jonny Rocket told us. "Some venue regulars got together and decided to win the top prize. They got hold of an iPod, and made mixes up - some drum and bass, some rave stuff, and a hook for the end of the set... The place went crazy. It was so funny. Everyone in there hit the floor - hands in the air - singing along. And it was not just the party people - bar staff jumped across their table and joined in. It was great."



If the idea sounds good, you'll understand why Playlist Club has spread from its home at The Progress Bar in London to a second location in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Khyber, with its Playlist debut set for March 28 at 7:30pm. More locales are under consideration, as well. Currently, Playlist's events are monthly, but they'll likely increase in regularity.

"We are hosting more and more of these advanced music lovers who like to create a remix of tracks, and like to come to our club to test their concept against an audience," said Rocket. "We are also seeing more musicians turning up, with their own music loaded and ready to go, testing their creations against our audience's obsessions. We love that, too." Is an iPod DJ culture developing? Visit one of the Playlist clubs to hear for yourself.



Tomorrow's DJ tools fit in the palm
of your hand. **HP's DJammer**
prototype turns finger and wrist
motions into remixes of live music.

While the iPod's great for playing back songs, its missing links for DJs are control issues: you can't change pitch or tempo, flick through equalization settings in the blink of an eye, create loops or scratch like a turntable master. Researchers at Hewlett Packard are developing a solution - and making it wireless.



The DJammer is a handheld remixing tool with all of these features and more, easy enough to use with a set of headphones, but powerful enough to replace turntables at a club.

HP's prototype (above) is held in the hand, using inertial and tilt sensors to create album scratching sounds on live digital music tracks, with buttons that change pitch, tempo, bass and ratios between two songs, as hinted in the concept development sketch (left). A separate wireless receiver block sits on the floor or a table,



connecting to the DJ's booth equipment with wires. The DJ might pull music wirelessly from the booth to the DJammer, or store music on the DJammer to play back.

There's no plan to commercialize the technology, but DJs are already lining up to give it a try. We're ready for it.

Buying Music Online. Apple's iTunes Music Store is great, but it's not the only option: new iPod-compatible services have emerged as competitors. But how do they compare? And are they safe places to spend your cash?



Eighty-eight cents per song, no copying restrictions, and no support from major label artists: it's MP3Tunes.com.

If you want to start a music download site that challenges all the major record labels, you need to be prepared to offer music that - well - isn't from any of the major record labels. And that's what MP3Tunes.com is: a place to get legal 88-cent (or \$8.88 per album) downloads from outside the mainstream.

A recent search of the site's most popular albums and artists, for example, included a tribute album to Kinky Friedman, a lot of Irish music, and "Dreamworld: Music Inspired By The Matrix." Los Angeles-based indie artist Emily Richards had six songs in the site's top 25, while Dublin's indie Linda Lu had three.

But if something you find at MP3Tunes floats your boat, you'll be thrilled with the pricing and the lack of restrictions on how you use the songs. Every download is in MP3 format - universally compatible with all PCs and Macs, the iPod, and every other digital music player except for some Sony models. Tracks are encoded at a high bitrate (variable 192K, versus the constant 128K used by other sites), and have no copy protection, so you can put them on as many devices as you own without problems.

We're always glad to see competition on music pricing, quality, and use restrictions, so Mp3Tunes.com is more than okay by us. It's not the only indie store out there, but it's an interesting one.

Cheap overseas download sites: dangerous gray area, or fantastic bargain?

If you're downloading albums by major label recording artists for free, you probably know that you're risking the wrath of the RIAA. But what about songs offered for four cents a piece, or a dollar or two per album? If you pay something for downloads, is that enough to protect yourself from being sued?

That's the question posed by a few web sites - often operated outside of the United States - that advertise penny-per-megabyte downloads of popular music. One of the more notable is Russia-based AllofMP3.com, which offers a surprisingly robust collection of albums from major recording artists in the compressed, unprotected audio format of your choice, including iPod-compatible MP3s. More amazingly, songs are available for download at rates of only 4-10 cents per track.

Is AllofMP3.com legal? The recording industry recently tried unsuccessfully to have copyright infringement charges brought against the site's operators. But Russian prosecutors concluded that the country's copyright laws don't cover the site's activities. However, other sites offering similarly priced downloads of major recording artists' products, such as the Spanish site Puretunes.com, have been sued and shut down.

iPodlounge doesn't take a position on the legality of any overseas site, but we urge our readers to exercise caution. There's no guarantee that any "purchased" music from these stores is a replacement for store-purchased CDs or licensed tracks from established domestic vendors of digital music. For now, your safest bet is to buy from reputable companies with music stores that are specific to your country of residence.



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Call us for dealers near you **1.800.644.1132** or visit us at: **www.macally.com**

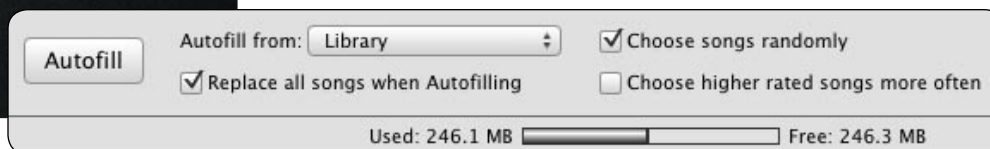
42

What's new in iTunes? Apple's industry-leading digital music program previously let you turn CDs into iPod song files, organize your collection, and download new music. Newly added: iPod shuffle tools, liner notes, and art.

iPod shuffle-friendly features: Autofill, auto-shrink songs.



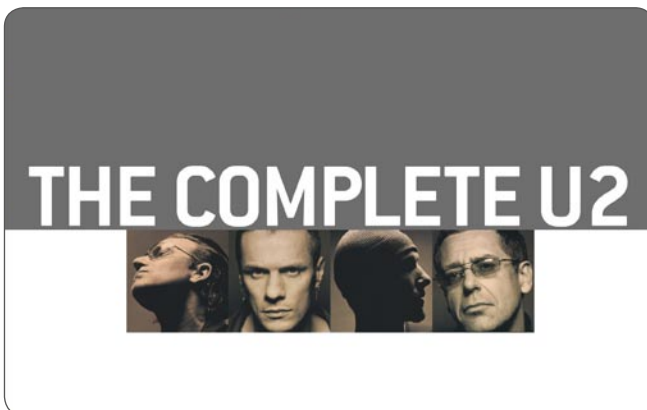
Added to iTunes in January, Autofill is a new feature designed for use with the iPod shuffle: with one button press, you can empty the shuffle's current contents and replace it with a collection of new music. Using four easy boxes, you can decide whether to pick songs entirely randomly, focus on your top-rated songs, and/or only choose songs from a specific playlist. You can also tell Autofill to both erase and fill your shuffle, or just fill whatever portion is still empty. Alternately, iTunes now also lets you keep a playlist of the shuffle's contents in your Library at all times, and you can manually add or remove any songs you like - even when the shuffle's not plugged in.



iPod shuffle

- ☒ Open iTunes when this iPod is attached
- ☐ Keep this iPod in the source list
- ☐ Only update checked songs
- ☐ Convert higher bit rate songs to 128 kbps AAC for this iPod

Shuffle users will also like iTunes' new optional ability to automatically downsample high-bitrate tracks into shuffle-ready 128KBPS songs. Check the box (left) and you can fit more tracks, but they'll take longer to transfer, and mightn't sound as good with premium-quality earphones.



Digital booklets (aka Liner Notes.)

Though Apple's not yet making a big deal out of it, a handful of iTunes discs now include "Digital Booklets" that approximate the liner notes you get with CDs. U2 and Jack Johnson albums are the first to include the booklets, which are in PDF format and can be viewed by iTunes. They appear as tracks in your Library; expect many more of these soon.



Album art and photos.



Though it's not exactly new, every iTunes Music Store download now includes album art - a photo of the front of a band's CD package that appears if you click the fourth icon on the left side of the iTunes Library window. Double clicking on the picture opens the cover up in a large window, and iPod photo owners now can display the shots in full color on their screens. iPod photo hardware also benefits from a new options menu that will create iPod photo versions of any photos found in specified folders on your computer. The process takes a while, but works.

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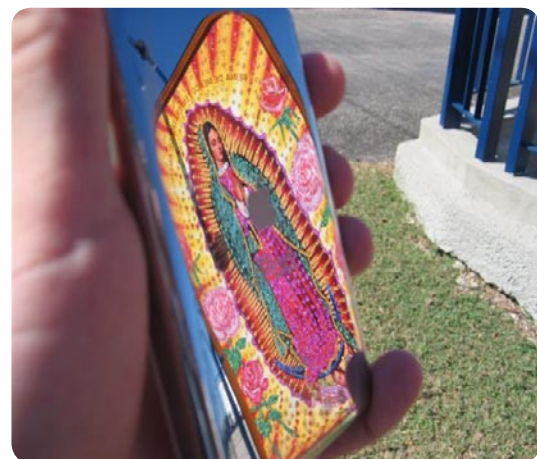


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Tower of Pisa, Italy



Merida, Yucatan, Mexico



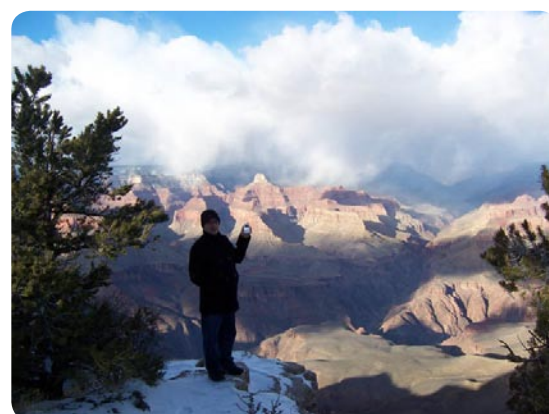
Playa Hermosa, Costa Rica

Of all the iPodlounge galleries, our iPods Around the World collections are the most popular and famous. Since the last Buyers' Guide, we've broken the 3,000-photo mark, as our readers have marked major local events and the growth of the iPod family with beautiful visual tributes. Some of our favorite new photos are here; see the Gallery online for more.

iPods Around the World: 3,000 photos and counting!



The Gates, Central Park, New York City



Buddha Temple, Grand Canyon, Arizona



Independence Square, Kiev, Ukraine



Kuwait/Iraq Border



Uhuru Peak, Kilimanjaro, Tanzania (The Roof of Africa)



Taiwan 101 (World's Tallest Bldg.), Taipei, Taiwan



Pyramid of Chephren, Cairo, Egypt



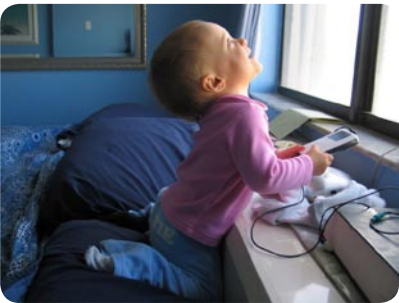
Golden Pavilion, Kyoto, Japan

The Best of the Rest

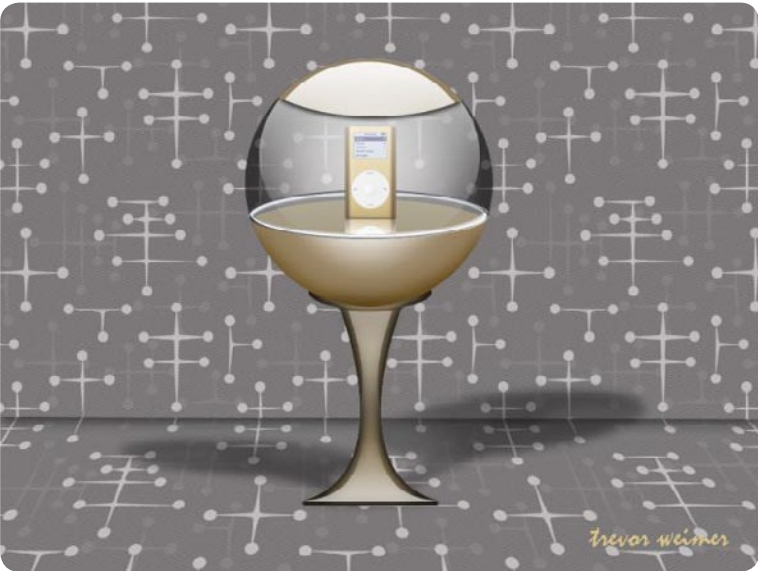
There are more than 2,000 photos and pieces of art in iPodlounge's other galleries. These are some of the best new additions.



Shuffle Love



Little girl and her iPod



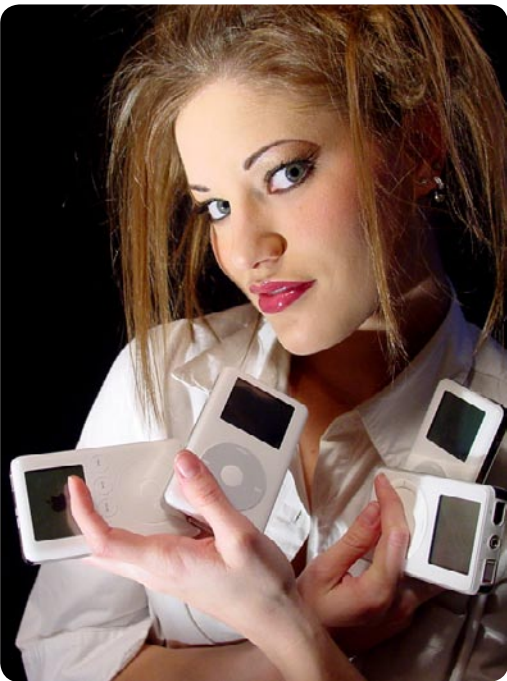
My Mini Gold iPod by Trevor Weimer



Florida vacation



iPodlounge Wave



The iPod Party

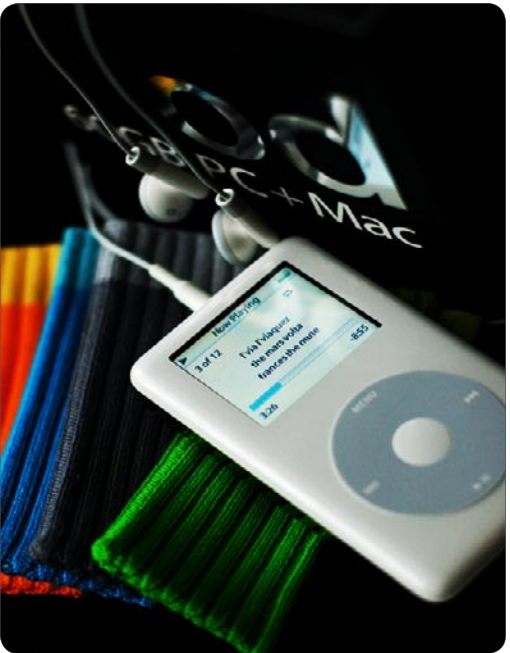
iPodlounge Buyers' Guide
Cover Contest
Best Submissions

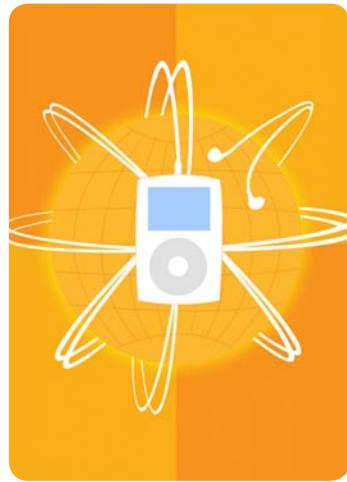
In the process of announcing this Buyers' Guide, iPodlounge sponsored a contest to let readers create the issue's cover. You've seen the winning entry already; the entries on this page were some of our other favorites.



Second Place Winner (above)

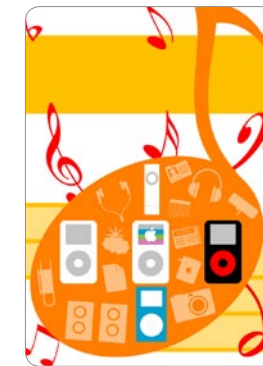
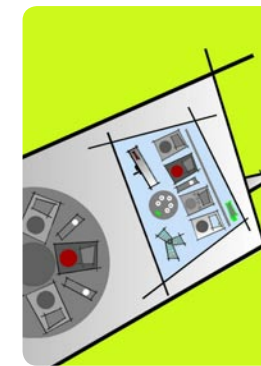
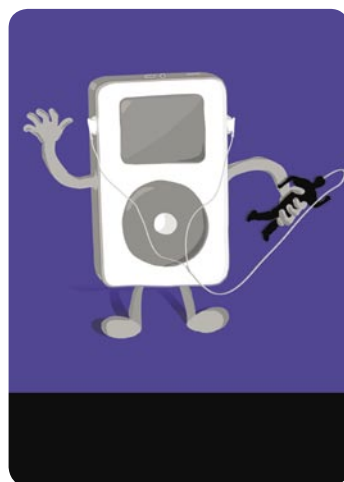
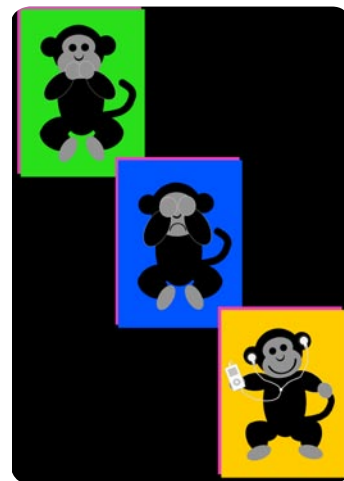
Luke Sevcik of Elgin, Illinois
Prize: One Year Audible.com Membership +
TEN Technology naviPro eX Wireless Remote





Other Great Entries

Many of the other entries we received had great ideas with superb style and execution. We're looking forward to seeing what you come up with in future iPodlounge photo and art contests!



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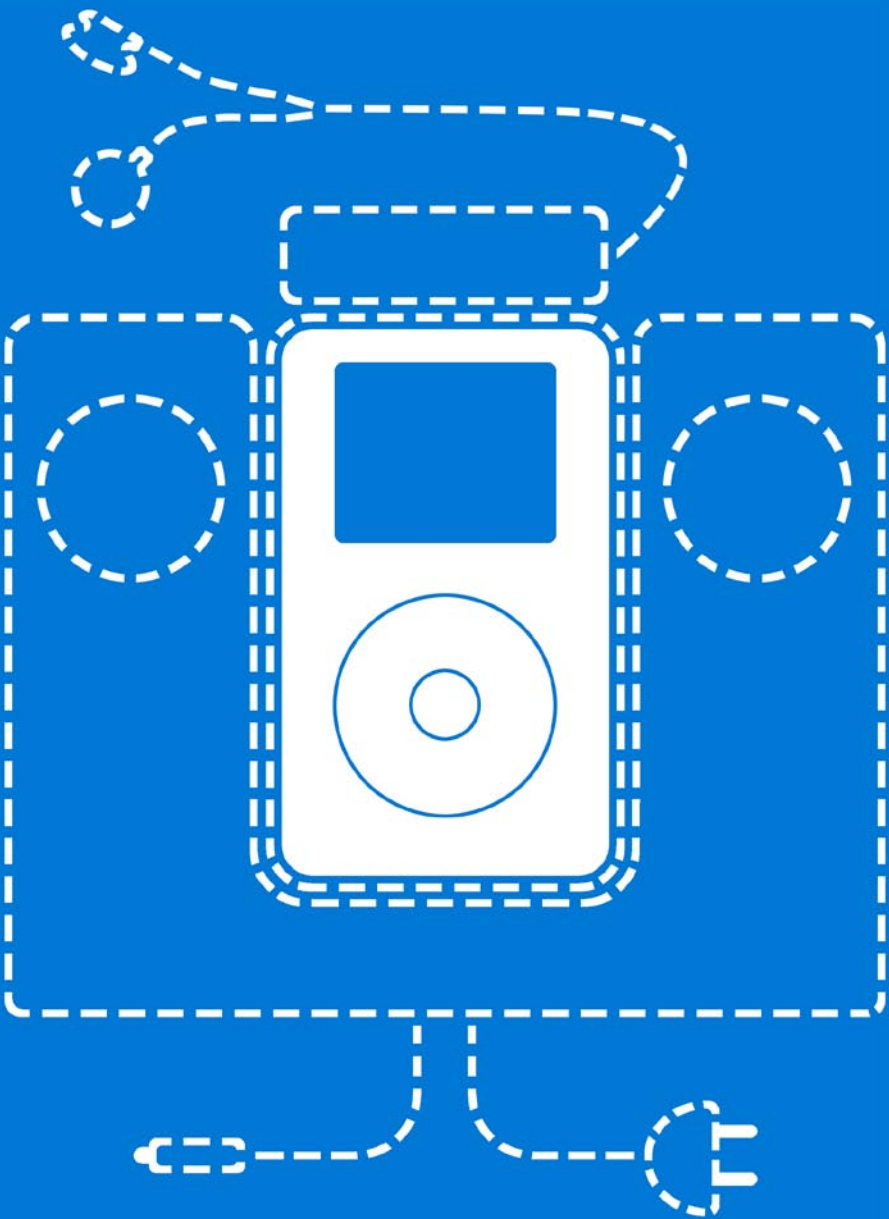
For more product info, visit our website at www.batterytech.com or email us at ipod@batterytech.com

Battery Technology, Inc. 16500 Gale Ave. Industry, CA 91745 Tel: 626.336.6878

Spring/Summer

ipodlounge

Buyers' Guide Reviews 2005



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The Report Card

How and why we rate products

iPodlounge reviews and rates iPods and accessories in order to provide the iPod community with a honest, objective, and comprehensive source of product information. Though the Buyers' Guide focuses primarily on A and B rated products, we provide a Report Card at the end showing ratings for the over 300 iPod accessories we have reviewed - the good, the bad, and the ugly.

In February, 2005, we introduced our Policy on Dangerous, Defective, and Illicit Products, under which we automatically assign harsh grades of D- and F to accessories that are defective or potentially dangerous. For more information on this policy, please visit ipodlounge.com/safetypolicy.

While we strive to cover "all things iPod," we have recently been faced with an influx of products from companies that we have chosen not to publicize for various reasons, including questionable customer service, business, or other practices. As it's our goal to recommend (A or B grades) only products and companies that will satisfy our readers' reasonable needs, we encourage our readers to actively participate in our discussion forums and keep their fellow iPod lovers informed about their buying experiences - positive or negative, so long as they're honest and not commercially motivated.

A A grades are awarded to only the very best products - ones that we **highly recommend**. An A- grade indicates one or two small deficiencies that limit the product's universal appeal, and for reference, even the original iPod would not have received an A+ grade from iPodlounge. We haven't awarded one yet, and may never do so.

B B+ and B grades are awarded to very good and good products - ones that we **recommend** only to specific audiences. A B- grade is on the fine edge of "good" and "recommendable." It indicates a product that is better than average, but has a few medium to large issues that crimp its appeal. We typically recommend a B-product only to people who really need its functionality.

C C graded products are "okay" or "average" ones that **we neither recommend nor dislike**. They perform all of their stated functions acceptably, but may not be attractively designed, well thought out, or appropriately priced. A C+ grade indicates that the product was a little bit better than average, but still not "good" or "recommendable." The C- grade indicates that the product was on the edge of being bad, and though it worked substantially as promised, possessed some serious design issues.

D D graded products are ones that we **actively disliked** for some reason. Typically, the reason is that the product provided such substantially below-average design, performance or pricing that it was nearly laughable by comparison to other available offerings.

D- Under iPodlounge's policy on defective and dangerous products, any product graded with a D- was **defective** in some substantial way when we tested it, or subsequently revealed to be defective based on substantial reader input or manufacturer admission.

F F graded products were **potentially dangerous** when we tested them. Under our policy on defective and dangerous products, we only award a grade of F if a product contains a defect that could seriously damage itself, the attached iPod, or the purchaser. Examples of products that have received F grades include power chargers that do not properly regulate power going to the iPod's electronic components, and a stereo that could burst its batteries when connected to both battery and AC power.

We liked Nevin Styre's cover contest entry (above) so much that we thought it would make a perfect cover for the Buyers' Guide Reviews section. As a special thank you, Nevin will receive an iPod shuffle.

Apple Computer iPod shuffle (512MB/1GB)



How can an iPod be an A- product for some users but a B product for others? Easy: if it's incredibly cheap but leaves out some features that some people practically demand. That's Apple's iPod shuffle (\$99-\$149): the iPod for people who don't need to carry large music collections or arbitrarily pick and choose songs. Think of it as a chewing gum pack-sized stick of white plastic with a play button, earbuds, and three status lights instead of a screen. The \$99, 512-Megabyte version holds around 10 CDs (120 songs) worth of music, the \$149, 1-Gigabyte version around 20 CDs (240 songs). They're otherwise identical.

And equally simple to use. Volume up and down buttons are joined by track forward and backward controls on the front. Two of the shuffle's three status lights are hidden above the wheel, illuminating when you play, pause, or connect to your computer. A power switch and a battery strength indicator button are on the back, while a bottom cap hides a USB 2.0 plug. Assuming your computer has a powered USB port, you plug the shuffle in, fill it up with songs using Apple's included (and excellent) iTunes software, and recharge its battery.

Thankfully, you won't charge too often: Apple's "12-hour" battery actually played for 18.5 hours in our tests. You might only remove the standard USB cap to swap the packed-in fabric lanyard necklace cap on and off. But you'll probably want to change your music. The "shuffle" name is a reference to one of only two ways you can use the device: its three position power switch lets you play back songs in random ("shuffled") order, or in a specific order you chose with your computer when you transferred music. Apple's suggestions: pick and choose your songs beforehand, or just let chance be your muse.

Some people - particularly athletes, multiple iPod owners, and parents with iPod-hungry kids - will buy entirely into Apple's plan. As easy as iPods and iPod minis have been to use, maintain, and carry, the iPod shuffle's even easier. It plays audiobooks, MP3 format music files, and iTunes Music Store downloads. Because it can also store small amounts of data, and works instantly on almost any Windows or Mac with a USB port, it's a convenient way to carry school assignments, business files, and other information from place to place.

But predictably, other people really won't like the shuffle's limitations. Apple doesn't include a wall charger, so if your computer's USB ports aren't powered, you'll need to buy one for \$29. Moreover, the shuffle is incompatible with virtually all of the hundreds of iPod accessories that have been released, so you can't record audio, use a remote control, or charge and mount it in your car. Yet. And the \$149 model is only \$50 cheaper than an iPod mini with better battery life and four times the capacity. Finally, the shuffle doesn't play large AIFF or Apple Lossless Audio files, but few prospective shuffle owners will care.

Overall, the iPod shuffle is a cheap and easy way to join the iPod revolution, but it's not for everyone. Given the choice between a \$149 shuffle and a \$199 iPod mini, we'd pick the iPod mini, but if you're just looking for a \$99 iPod, this is the only option in town - and an excellent one for certain types of users.

Apple's official iPod shuffle accessories At \$29 each, they cover the spectrum from good to great



Armband
Cleanly designed and easy to wear, it doesn't protect the shuffle, but looks good. Worth \$29? There's no alternative.



Dock
A way to stand your shuffle upright, with a USB cable built in. But no audio output? Like the look, hate the price.



Power Adapter
You'll need it for charging if your PC lacks a powered USB port. Also works with other iPods, and fully reviewed two pages from here.



Battery Pack
Apple promises 20 hours of extra juice for every two AAA batteries you use. We haven't tested this yet, but expect it to perform well.



Sport Case
The best shuffle case we've seen so far - water-resistant with a hot clear, orange, white and gray design. Worth the price, includes a useful cable.

Third-party iPod shuffle protectors. Early shuffle guards vary in style and protectiveness.

Marware SportGrip and Richard Forbes SportRope

If Marware's correct, there will be as much demand for fun iPod shuffle accessories as protective ones, and in that spirit, the company's SportGrip (\$8.95) was developed. With a single piece of sculpted rubber that covers the shuffle's sides, top and bottom, SportGrip exposes both front and back faces to the elements. A caribiner comes with SportGrip, mounting at the shuffle's bottom, but can easily be replaced by your choice of necklaces as well. Jeweler Richard Forbes just happens to sell replacement iPod shuffle lanyards called SportRopes (\$9.99 each), rubber tubes that link together with quality metal clasps to form a lanyard. Available in a variety of colors, the SportRopes fit perfectly with the Keychain Holder, creating a more stylish impromptu neck holder for the shuffle.



Pacific Rim Gel Shield Silicone Cases

Thinner and available in more colors than some competitors, Pacific Rim Technologies' Gel Shields (\$11.99) are just about as protective as most people would need: they won't rip unless you really tug their corners, and cover the entire iPod shuffle, including its standard USB cap. Best yet, their headphone port holes are sized to fit third-party headphones, so you'll have no problem plugging in whatever you want to listen with.



However, they overcomplicate the look of the iPod's controls, with translucent icons that are hard to match up with the shuffle's, and thereby look a little messy when inspected up close. They're also individually pricey, though you can buy a three-pack for under \$25. Not a bad start for the emerging iPod shuffle case market.

Power Support Shuffle Jacket

Power Support has made silicone rubber iPod cases in Japan for years, and only recently brought its products stateside. The Shuffle Jacket (\$22) is a pretty well-designed shuffle protector, with thick frosted rubber and smart ways to permit access to both the front and rear controls. But its headphone port is tolerant only of Apple's original earbuds, so you might want another case if you're looking to use a different set of headphones. An optional fabric wrist strap bears the company's name and slips into a tiny hole in the Jacket's side. It's a clean, attractive design with only one real issue.

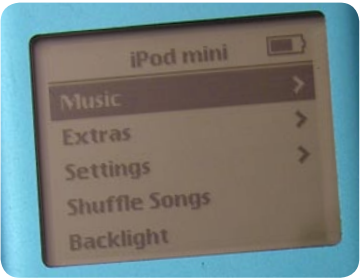


CaPDase SkinGuard Stickers and Pods Plus Leather Cases

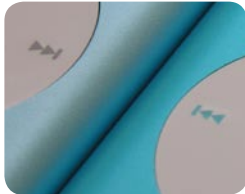
Two different offerings out of Chinese iPod accessory makers test the definition of "case." CaPDase's clear SkinGuard stickers (\$5) cover every inch of an iPod shuffle with super-thin protective film, but they come off too quickly to be counted upon. Pods Plus's Leather Cases (\$19.99) are made from okay leather and leave several major parts (bottom sides, front and rear controls, headphone port and lights) exposed, but look quite nice. Both options work well with Apple's packed-in lanyard USB cap, but neither is as protective as we'd hope an iPod shuffle "case" would be. Consider them mostly decorative and practical only if you don't mind peeling or scratching.



Apple Computer Second-Generation iPod mini (4/6GB)



How have the minis changed?



Extended battery life, price, and storage capacity options aside, the only differences between first- and second-generation minis are cosmetic. Newer minis come in four of the same five colors as older ones - the blue, green, and pink ones use more vibrant metal coloring, while the silver color's the same, and Apple no longer sells a gold version. New minis have colored icons on their Click Wheels instead of gray icons, and feature "4GB" or "6GB" markings on their backs. Otherwise, they're the same - same size, same weight, same screen and bodies.

Last year, the first-generation iPod mini was Apple's cheapest and smallest digital music player, but that changed with January's introduction of the iPod shuffle. By February, Apple had re-assessed and tweaked the now "mid-range" mini into a second-generation version, boosting its battery life, tweaking its colors (see below), and changing its price. Today, Apple offers two minis - one with four Gigabytes (1,000 songs) of storage (\$199), and one with six Gigabytes (1,500 songs, \$249). Both promise 18-hour continuous playback time, but delivered over 26 hours in our testing - the iPod family's best time yet.

As currently priced and configured, iPod minis are an almost ideal "first iPod" for teenagers and mainstream iPod buyers: as the average person owns around 100 CDs, even the 4GB model is adequate to hold a complete - but small - music collection. With the footprint of a business card and thickness of a candy bar, their resilient anodized aluminum bodies can stand up pretty well to things that would scratch other iPods. And they include Apple's top-notch controller - the Click Wheel, a touch-sensitive flat surface that lets you scroll up and down through menus or adjust volume, with four depressable buttons on its north, south, west and east sides. Plus, every mini includes a USB cable, white earbuds, Apple's awesome iTunes software, and a simple belt clip.

A few other factors don't hurt their appeal, either: minis come in four colors, are almost completely compatible with existing iPod accessories, and have a huge variety of attractive protective cases available. Mini-specific exercise accessories have been particularly popular and useful. Support from Apple's third-party developers has similarly been strong; FM transmitters and remote controls have been made in mini versions, while Altec Lansing's inMotion iMmini speakers even outperformed their full-sized iPod cohorts in our testing.

Storage differences aside, the mini does compromise the full-sized iPod experience in a few other ways: its screen is a bit smaller, and though Apple partially compensated by using a more readable small font, it displays one less line of text than the iPod. On a related note, its built-in games, particularly Solitaire, aren't as easy to see as on the larger iPod's screen, though they're playable. More annoyingly, Apple no longer includes a wall power charger with the mini, so you'll need to charge it through your computer's powered USB port - assuming you have one - or buy a charger separately (see below).

Value remains our biggest concern. Though a \$199 4GB mini is a better value than last year's \$249 4GB mini, you get a lot more for the dollar with a \$299 20GB iPod or \$349 30GB iPod photo. Both come with wall chargers, hold far more music (or data), and provide an equal or better experience overall. But the mini's size, build quality, and overall combination of features continues to impress new and prospective iPod owners even a year after its first release. Assuming you can live with its small capacity and don't mind how much more powerful its bigger brothers are, you'll find the mini about as beautifully designed as a small iPod could get - and better compromised than the shuffle.

Do I have to buy an Apple power charger?



If you want to top off your iPod mini's power, you'll either need to use your computer or buy a wall charger. Apple's USB Power Charger and FireWire Power Charger are both priced at \$29.00, but only the USB version will work with the cable that now comes with iPod minis. Both smooth white plastic chargers fully charge an iPod in approximately four hours, and fit easily into any bag you might carry. But there are less expensive options from other companies - or at least better values. Capdase's Universal iPod Adapter (\$28) includes travel adapters.

Mini fashion cases. If you're looking to upscale your iPod mini with a fashionable cloak, start here. These are some of the most distinctive cases, though they vary in protectivity.

Kate Spade mini iPod Cases

Gold is a theme in each of famed fashionista Kate Spade's four cases: gold crinkle leather or metallic snake go for \$75.00, while pink/green leather or rose faux croc are \$55.00. Each has a gold snap to close a top flap, a gold ring that connects the case with a significant matching wrist strap, and a gold rivet to hold the strap together. The Kate Spade logo appears at the bottom rear of each case, lightly embossed in gold ink. Significant feeling fabrics add a greater sense of iPod security to these cases than some other fashion cases we've seen, though the crinkle leather case itself will require delicate hands and care; the same crinkle leather appears on the inside and out, while non-crinkle cases have softer leather inside.



Our only issue is protectiveness, which is undercut by the iPod mini's exposed sides, Wheel, and top. While we assume that the typical buyer will take care of the case and iPod, be aware that these cases are higher maintenance than others. You'll love how they look too much to let them get scratched up, a rare dilemma for an iPod case.

Vaja iVod mini

Rare is the iPod fashion case that's at least as attractive for men as for women, but Vaja's iVod mini (\$60.00) pulls that off. The soft, semi-puffed leather case covers all of the mini's corners properly, providing two millimeters of impact resistance on all sides. A high-class sewn black fabric interior grips the mini without scratching it, and the built-in hard screen protector looks and works great. Vaja currently offers 26 different colors for buyers to choose from - everything from white to gray to black, red to green to blue, many colors in multiple shades, plus text engraving, logo embossing, and an optional belt clip. The only design issues buyers may have: the iVod mini doesn't cover the iPod's Click Wheel, top or bottom. And even having recently raised the iVod mini's lowest price, Vaja still isn't offering its great 4G Click Wheel protector as a mini option. That said, if the price doesn't scare you away, you're certain to love the iVod mini. It's luxury worthy of an iPod.



Tunewear Prie Classic Face

One of the three best leather cases we've seen for the iPod mini is Tunewear's Prie (\$24.95), a decidedly feminine two-tone iPod mini purse that uses superb leather, precision stitching, and high-quality metal clasps and straps to create a luxurious little package. It's built as well as cases sold for twice its price, and though Tunewear offers a bewildering array of options, we recommend the Classic Face version with your choice of straps - arm or necklace. Pink, black, green and gray versions are available - the gray a fabric version - and we're confident that none will disappoint. Our only issues: the headphone and bottom ports are on the small side, and only meant for Apple attachments.



Miyavix Kimono Cases

As fabric cases go, we've never seen more beautiful ones than Miyavix's Kimono Cases (\$40.00), cloth and leather hybrids using three different Japanese patterns. To describe the cloth as intricate or beautiful is an understatement; for floral patterns, they are detailed beyond comparison. Blue, red, and yellow versions are offered; we preferred blue. Black leather frames the iPod mini's holes, and the cases are more than adequately protective save one issue: they don't include screen or wheel protection, which you need to buy separately. Our guess is that most buyers won't mind: these are like buying pieces of art for your iPod, only far less expensive than they could have been.



Mini travel, exercise, and waterproof Cases. Whether rain, sun, or wind's in your hair, one of these cases will protect your iPod better than any of the other options we've tested.

STM Mini Cocoon

Now available in versions for both full-sized and mini iPods, STM's Cocoons (\$39.95) are only a little bit short of brilliant. You get a plastic or rubber iPod case for everyday use, complete with a detachable lanyard necklace, and a hard polymer outer shell - the Cocoon - that zippers up around the iPod when you're travelling. Even when closed, the case accommodates headphones. And STM offers two colors - carbon (depicted) and lilac.

The mini version's better than the full-sized one, which needlessly includes Velcro to attach the two cases. Both Cocoons use soft fabric interiors and include a mesh pocket to hold your earbuds. There's also a quality hard plastic belt clip on the back, which regrettably isn't detachable - a minor omission in an otherwise awesome case.

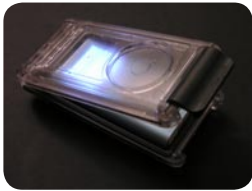


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OtterBox for iPod mini

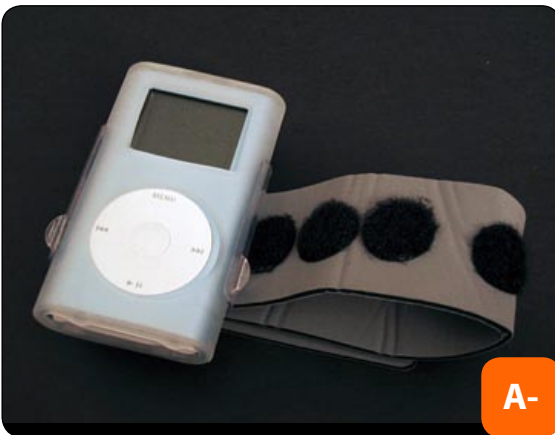
A truly waterproof iPod mini case with full access to both screen and controls? Under \$50? That's the OtterBox for iPod mini (\$49.95). Though two other waterproof mini cases are now available, neither meets both of the above criteria, and OtterBox's case performed perfectly when we tested it. Though you shouldn't expect to do any iPod scuba diving - it only works to a depth of 10 feet - now you can affordably enjoy swimming, jogging in the rain, or even (ahem) showering with your mini. The included detachable belt clip is alright, but you'll want the optional armband (\$14.95) if you want to exercise with it, and a pair of waterproof headphones for anything other than listening in the rain.



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Speck Products Mini Arm Band

Apple and Speck Products both make arm band accessories for the iPod mini, but in a surprising turn of events, Speck's Mini Arm Band (\$29.95, shown left) came out on top. Apple's white and black iPod mini Armband (\$29.00) is little more than a neoprene strip with a plastic iPod mini clip and Velcro arm attachments. Speck's version includes a soft plastic iPod mini case, a transparent iPod clip large enough to hold the encased iPod mini, and an almost identical neoprene and Velcro arm band combination. As a result, your iPod is better protected against rain, sweat, and accidental droppage in Speck's offering, which is now available with a black armband rather than its not-as-attractive original green. Apple's also now selling five new colors - orange, yellow, blue, pink, and gray - instead of black.



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Marware SportSuit Convertible



belt clip. Six colors (black, pink, blue, green, gold and silver) are available, too. It's not the first case we'd pick to use without the armband and the front flap attached, but it's a very good option overall, pricing considered.

While not as sleek and showy as Apple and Speck's armband options, Marware's SportSuit Convertible for the iPod mini (\$34.95) is more protective. With a two-piece "Convertible" case design that adds a detachable flip-open hard lid to a soft neoprene and clear vinyl case, Marware also includes an optional quality armband and a solid-feeling custom



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Mini compromise cases. These cases combine good looks, cool features, and generally fair prices to create options that many people love. Fabric, plastic, or metal? You decide.

Marware TrailVue Mini

One of the coolest fabric cases we've seen for the iPod mini is Marware's TrailVue Mini (\$29.95), a striped ballistic nylon front and back panel available in seven color combinations. When opened, TrailVue cases reveal a heavy-gauge Mylar iPod mini sheathe with holes cut out for the top, bottom Dock Connector port, and Click Wheel controller - each of which is largely covered by the case and a Velcro bottom latch. Earphones are easy to plug in, and the quality Marware belt clip is easy to detach.

Though it's facially similar to many of the PDA-style flip-open cases we generally pass over, the TrailVue is significantly better than most because of its modern styling and attention to overall iPod protection. The nylon body's significantly more resilient than leather, and the stripe only adds to the visual appeal. While TrailVue's pricier than most of its fabric competitors, men and women alike will appreciate its attention to iPod mini details.



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Speck Mini FlipStand

As clear hard plastic iPod mini cases are concerned, Speck's Mini FlipStand (\$29.95) has no peer. When fully closed, it covers the entire iPod mini except for its headphone port and Hold switch, and it has an innovative Click Wheel protector that opens to become a mounting stand. A non-detachable belt clip is small and unobtrusive. You can open the case's top to use accessories or unusually large headphone plugs, as well as to remove or insert the mini. But the case's bottom Dock Connector hole is way too small, preventing the FlipStand from being useful with any bottom-mounting accessories save Apple's own cables. Users of car chargers like us will likely find this a problem, but everyone else will love the clean, showy design and solid protection.



B+

Capdase Metal Case for iPod mini

If you want to make a positive impression as a new entrant into the iPod case business, release a smart, high-quality case at a reasonable price. PDA case maker Capdase did just that with the Metal Case for iPod mini (\$29.99), which impressively includes a unique internal rubber case for the iPod and your choice of two metal external shells - polished or unpolished. A quality metal and plastic lanyard necklace is also in the box, along with a good hard plastic screen protector and highly unimpressive belt clip - the package's only true negative, aside from its lack of Click Wheel protection. Overall, we love the style, love the price, and strongly appreciate Capdase's innovation on this one.



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Power Support Square Type Jacket



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iTrip mini. It's affordable, appeals to everyone, and adds plenty of anti-shock protection to the iPod's corners. We named it the best iPod mini case of 2004, and it's still our favorite today - in clear color, specifically, not white or black.

If only every iPod case was as interesting and beautiful as Power Support's Square Type Jacket (\$22.00), a block of clear frosted rubber that turns your iPod mini into a squared-off prism of soft colors. Each Square Type includes screen and Click Wheel protective film guards, and exposes the iPod's top for use with accessories such as Griffin's



Apple Computer Fourth-Generation iPod (20GB)



When it was introduced last July, Apple's 20-Gigabyte iPod (\$299.00) was almost a no-brainer for first-time iPod owners. It incorporated all of the best features of Apple's earlier iPods, starting with the great audio quality, easy user interface, large screen, and iconic white-on-metal body pioneered by first-generation (2001) iPods - features that continued to set iPods apart from all competitors. Then Apple used the sleeker curves and Dock Connector accessory ports from third-generation (2003) iPods, added the iPod mini's (early 2004) intuitive Click Wheel controls, and bolstered the battery life.

Consequently, the fourth-generation iPod carries several major advantages over other companies' products: it uses the most intuitive and ingenious digital music control scheme yet devised, and is compatible with an incredible array of accessories - including digital photo storage and voice recording tools, special speaker systems, and in-car add-ons. It's affordable, holds 5,000 songs worth of music, and can be used as a portable hard disk for any computer data you might want to carry in your pocket. Better yet, there's a huge community of users who own iPods, so if you can't figure something out, help's available.

But the 20GB iPod's biggest selling point is that everything a digital music novice might really need is already in the box. Like every iPod, it includes Apple's familiar white headphones and the ability to connect to your PC or Mac via cable for data transfers and recharging. There's a power charger, too. And best of all, it includes best-of-class music organization and downloading software (iTunes) that's easy enough for kids or grandparents to use.

Given its overall value for the dollar, it was no surprise that the 20GB iPod was Apple's most popular model for the 2004 holiday season. But plenty has changed since then: Apple has radically lowered the price points of other iPods and introduced the iPod shuffle. Is there still any reason for someone to want this iPod, given two lower-priced iPod minis and a modestly pricier color-screened, bigger capacity iPod photo?

Definitely. The 20GB iPod holds four times as many songs as the 6GB iPod mini that sells for only \$50 less, and comes with two pack-ins both minis omit: the wall charger (\$29) and a FireWire cable (\$19). It's only two ounces heavier than an iPod mini and a little bigger - still light and thin enough to carry or pocket while jogging. The 20GB iPod also includes a larger screen, and works with every electronic iPod accessory released; the iPod mini doesn't work with a few.

Comparisons against the newer, aggressively priced 30GB iPod photo are tougher. Inconsequential size and weight differences aside, the iPod photo's color screen is significantly better than the standard iPod's purplish black-and-white one, and its battery runs for as many as 17 hours. This is comparable to the new iPod mini's 18-26 hour runtime and noticeably longer than the iPod's 9-13 hours. And the iPod photo has 50% greater storage capacity, too. Lower entry price aside, we have almost every reason to recommend spending the extra \$50 for the 30GB iPod photo (shown at left to compare thickness).

Almost. While the black-and-white iPod is showing its age, doesn't incorporate many user-requested additional features (such as adjustable equalizers or full WMA support), and exhibited a minor audio defect that has annoyed numerous iPodlounge readers, it's still a highly competent music storage and playback device, and a good value for the dollar. It has a fair bit more music storage space than the average person needs - enough to grow into. And Mac users will also note that the more expensive iPod photos don't include the FireWire cable that's in the 20GB iPod's box.

Even with newer iPod models available, the fourth-generation 20GB iPod remains a good purchase. And there may also be numerous clones from competitors, but none of them touches the style, usability, and complete package offered by the iPod and iTunes. Any present-day alternative is guaranteed to be comparatively mediocre; only Apple will be able to obsolete this model. Our only questions at this point are: "with what?" and "when?"

The black iPod? The HP iPod? Are they different? Two other versions of the fourth-generation iPod are currently available. Is there any reason to prefer Apple's white original?

iPod U2 Special Edition Black, Red and Engraved



Also called the U2 iPod (\$349), this special edition iPod is a black and red 20GB iPod just like the white and gray one to the left, but with U2 band signature engravings on the back, and a photo poster in the box. Apple also includes a \$50 coupon towards the purchase of The Complete U2 (\$149), a digital box set of every song ever released by the band. Expect imminent discontinuation.

Apple iPod from HP A 40GB iPod? And a poster?



Hewlett-Packard's "Apple iPod from HP" comes in 20GB (\$299) and 40GB (\$399) capacities, and are identical to Apple's black and white iPod in literally every way except for an extra HP logo on the rear casing. An easy set-up poster's in the box along with HP's manuals and warranty service instead of Apple's; no Mac support is offered. We'd skip HP's 40GB iPod and get a 30GB iPod photo - color's the iPod's future.

Optional accessories. These add-ons used to appear in iPod boxes - now they're sold separately. Are they worth your \$39.00, or are there other, better alternatives out there?

Apple iPod Remote Get some distance from your iPod

There was a time when a separate review of the iPod's Remote (\$39.00) would not have been necessary for most new iPod buyers, but since Apple no longer includes this accessory with any iPod, we'll note our feelings here. The Remote is little more than a small cabled chrome and plastic remote control with five buttons (volume up/down, track forward/reverse, and play/pause) that - surprise - control the iPod. On the back of the Remote is a large plastic pinching clip that easily attaches to a shirt or jacket. In our experience, the plastic parts have a tendency to develop surface cracks over time when exposed to moderate heat (inside a car, for example), and the practical utility of the remote is limited except under rare circumstances. There's no denying that the Remote is radically overpriced, even though it includes an extra pair of the iPod's pack-in buds. You can get quality wireless remotes from TEN (naviPod), Griffin (AirClick) and others for about the same price.



Apple iPod Dock Make your iPod stand up and talk from its bottom

Apple used to include an iPod Dock with its two highest-end iPods; now it's sold separately for every iPod model from the shuffle to the iPod photo, each with a top casing that fits the specific model. The white plastic audio Dock enables the iPod to gently recline, displaying its screen in a natural position while charging, connecting to a computer, and/or playing audio. Each Dock uses a gray rubber pad to grip a flat surface, and the mini and large iPod Docks include line-out ports that pull the cleanest possible audio signals from the connected iPods - this makes additional Docks worthy attachments to your home stereo system(s). The iPod shuffle Dock lacks audio out, but includes a USB cable. Pacific Rim Technologies sells a cheaper and not as slick-looking 4G alternative called the iCradle (\$28.99), while SendStation's PocketDocks (\$18.95 to \$29.95) are similar but much smaller Dock substitutes. Nyko's Stereo Link (\$15.99) delivers the same audio quality, but can't charge iPods.



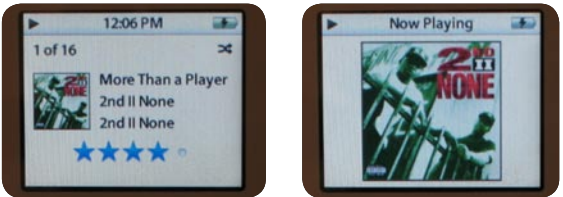
Apple Computer iPod photo (30/60GB)



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Enhanced user interface



The iPod photo's new user interface isn't a radical icon-based redesign of the old iPod menus. Instead, it adds splashes of color, a classier font (Myriad), and Mac OS X Aqua-inspired liquid scroll bars and progress indicators to the familiar text-based iPod interface. Apple's use of a higher resolution screen (220 x 176 with 65,536 colors, up from 160 x 128 and 4 grays) adds more detail and crispness to every menu. When you play back any song with album art stored in iTunes - included with every Music Store download - the cover appears on the iPod's screen during playback as an icon. Press the center button to enlarge the art on the screen; additional presses move you through place-in-song skipping and rating screens.

We fell in love when Apple introduced the iPod photo last November, and now that you can get a slimmer version for \$349.00 (30-Gigabytes) and the former top-of-line model for only \$449.00 (60-Gigabytes), we're even happier. It has all the music features we love in the old iPod, plus a new color screen, fifteen-plus hours of run time, and disk space for up to 15,000 songs. Best yet, it's affordable.

With the screens turned off, you could hardly tell the difference between iPods and iPod photos: they use the same Click Wheel controls, glossy white front and polished metal rear casings, extended headphone ports, Dock Connector bottom ports, and Hold switches. They're even comparable in thickness and weight: the 30GB model is only a millimeter and a half thicker than the 20GB iPod, while the 60GB model is three and a half thicker than the 30GB model.

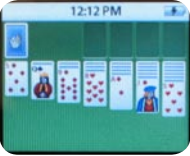
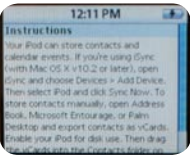
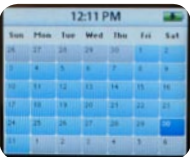
But when the screen's on, you immediately notice a very positive difference. The old black and white iPod interface has evolved into a more detailed and vivid form, complete with color and graphics (below, left), added photo display abilities (next page), and enhanced versions of the iPod's applications (below).

A simple recitation of those features ignores how impressively executed most of them are. By iPod standards, the new transfective color screen is gorgeous, with bright colors and a strong backlight that keeps the screen evenly illuminated. It's four steps better than the purple-and-white fourth-generation iPod screens, which themselves outshine cheaper competitors. Text is easier to read, icons and graphics are bold, and photos are easy on the eyes.

The enhanced battery is another major plus, even if it modestly thickens iPod photo cases. Even those who don't view photos on the screen will love the music playback time - our first music-only test lasted over 17 hours, seriously trumping Apple's estimate, and iPod batteries often improve in later tests. Though the photo's slideshow display ability (see next page) is a comparatively modest five-plus hours, that's more than enough for most photo presentations, or using the battery-draining accessories you'll need for photo transfers.

Except for the 60GB iPod photo's inability to fit in some speaker systems with integrated docks, our only issues with the platform's music abilities carry over from the 4G iPod. While we strongly emphasize that we love listening to music on the iPod photo, and that it's an A-caliber product in that regard, the product has not taken any steps forward in user-requested features such as adjustable equalizers or support for other file formats. Album art displays would likely have been far down the list. On another note, though Apple has dramatically dropped the iPod photo's prices, it also dropped most of the pack-ins earlier models used to include. The consequences will be apparent on the next page.

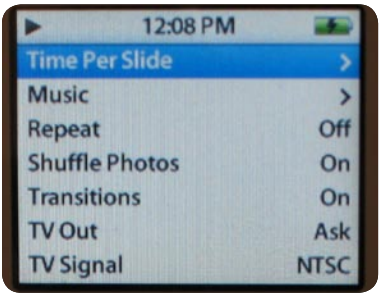
Familiar applications, new look



We'll admit that we play Solitaire on any iPod we're carrying, and if you're somewhat like us, you've used at least one of Apple's free games or applications - Calendar, Clock, Contacts, Notes, Brick, Music Quiz, Parachute and Solitaire. Each has received a more than pleasant color and resolution facelift for the iPod photo, with Calendar and Solitaire looking the best of all. Functionality wise, you'd be hard-pressed to find major differences between these and their older iPod equivalents, but the new screen does hold more text for Notes and Calendar entries and display everything just a bit more clearly. And Apple modestly changed the rotation controls on Solitaire - not for the better, in our view. We continue to hope that the company expands the suite of built-in programs; a color visualizer and/or screensavers to go along with music playback would be especially welcome.

Yes, it stores and plays back photos

Apple has music playback down to a virtual science on the iPod, but it's a relative newcomer to the portable photo storage and playback market. Unfortunately, this inexperience shows a bit in the iPod photo, which as of press time still suffers from small software and hardware limitations.



The iPod photo's good points are numerous. Once you've transferred your photos on to the device, you can create sequential "slideshows" that display either on the device's screen or your TV. Slideshows can be silent or accompanied by your choice of music, and transition from shot to shot with smooth Star Wars movie-style wipes. If displayed on the iPod, the pictures take up the full screen, but if you're using a TV, the iPod becomes a remote control with the prior, current and next pictures. In either case, the iPod's forward button skips forward a photo, reverse goes back a photo, play and pause and menu... you know. Play and pause icons appear on-screen in Mac OS X beveled form.



If you just want to view photos individually, the iPod photo stacks 25 thumbnails to a page, and you scroll through by touching the Click Wheel. Despite their small size and our concern that they'd be hard to discern from one another, the photos are impressively identifiable. Scrolling through photos is a little too fast, but otherwise fine; we'll hope for a tweak in future firmware.

Pictures look very good, but not spectacular on the iPod photo's screen, which is around half the resolution (38,720 pixels) of screens commonly used in low-end digital cameras (78,000) and a third of mid-range ones (118,000). Similarly, images are good on a TV if you use the Dock or AV Cable, now sold separately.

Last year, the iPod photo's biggest problem was that it was computer-dependent - serious photographers wanted a portable device that could store and play back pictures without docking with a PC or Mac, but the iPod photo fell short. Even though two expensive Belkin peripherals (Media Reader and Digital Camera Link) could transfer pictures onto the unit's hard disk, users couldn't "see" them until a computer with iTunes processed them. Apple has responded to the complaints with the iPod Camera Connector (\$29), a cable that will apparently enable the iPod photo to download and display pictures from cameras. Due in March, it hasn't appeared, but we hope that it proves compatible with a wide variety of cameras and doesn't kill the iPod's battery.

Without the cable, you'll still need to use iTunes to handle all of your photo processing. Unfortunately, iTunes 4.7's photo features are slow, non-iconic, and less intuitive than we'd like. We needed the manual to find the photo transfer button, which is hidden in an options menu. iTunes also failed to recognize our iPod photo until we restarted our Mac. And the (one-time-only) 90-minute optimization time for a 2,500-photo collection was painful. We've since experienced odd glitches requiring rebuilding of the iPod's photo database, as well. They're minor issues, but until fixed by Apple, will remain aggravating.

Glitches aside, there's little doubt once you've used the iPod photo's color interface that it represents the future standard for iPod hardware. It's a positive step forward, if not yet fully realized by Apple's software - but that will come. At a \$349 starting price - only \$50 more than last year's best-selling 20GB iPod - there's no excuse to hold off on the purchase. It's Apple's best iPod - for now.

The iPod photo Dock and iPod AV Cable: Now Options

To drop the iPod photo's price, Apple dropped its pack-ins. Consequently, today's iPod photos now include only headphones, a USB 2.0 cable, a wall power charger, manuals and iTunes software - nothing else. So now there are two key extras you may want: first is the iPod photo Dock (\$39), a clone of Apple's standard Dock with a S-Video port to its right rear side. The port lets a TV display cleaner video than is possible with Apple's long white AV Cable (\$19), which plugs into the iPod photo's headphone jack (!) and outputs both audio and composite video to any television. The cable looks cool, and works well (see TV photo below).



Our favorite full-sized iPod cases. There are hundreds of cases for white-bodied iPods and iPod photos - these are the best we've seen.

Fashion cases. These cases are stand-outs on looks and build quality, but vary in utility. If you're looking for something classy for a male or female iPod owner, start with these picks.

Acme Made **The Wallet**



Italian box leather has never looked as good as in Acme Made's The Wallet (\$59.99), a glossy lime, blue or black holder for all iPods save the iPod photo. The suede interior holsters your iPod and earbuds together in the center; a magnetic clasp keeps the case closed when you don't need access to the iPod screen or controls. More top and bottom iPod protectiveness would have been nice, but if you're careful with your iPods (or don't care about scratches), you'll love The Wallet's look.

Vaja **i-Volution 4G** Wheel Protector



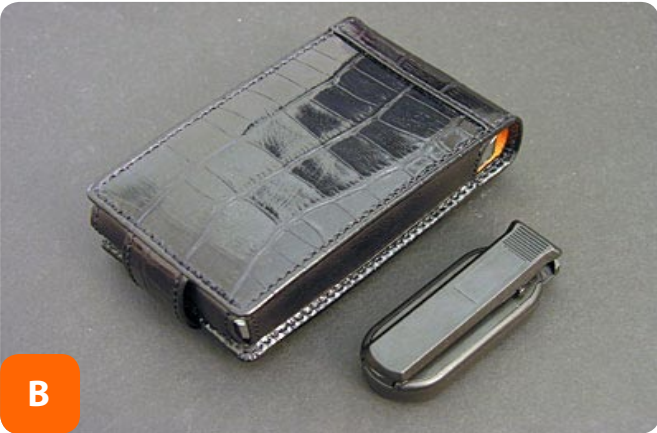
Argentina-based Vaja rules the roost in customizable leather iPod cases, and its new i-Volution 4G case (\$59.90 and up) furthers its superb reputation. With excellent but optional integrated Click Wheel protection, a very good plastic screen protector, and high-quality leather, the only thing this case wants for is greater top protectivity. Buyers can pick from tens of colors and combinations, add belt clips, or keep the i-Volution slender. The padded leather body is classic, and the look always turns heads.

Miyavix **Kimono Case**



Hand-made in Kyoto, Japan, the Miyavix Kimono case (\$40.00) has been selling out since its early 2005 introduction. Made from the same beautiful Japanese floral fabrics and leathers as the iPod mini version, the full-sized Kimono includes a leather internal spacer for use with different thicknesses of iPod and iPod photos. Top protection is limited and can't be helped, but we'd recommend adding 3D Wheel Film to cover the screen and Click Wheel controls - Power Support sells the cases and Film.

Piel Frama **Luxurious Leather Case**



High-end Spanish case maker Piel Frama's Luxurious Leather Case (\$118.00) is a love-it-or-pass-on-it design. With an exterior made from glossy crocodile-textured cow leather, this well-built, flip-open case offers very good protection and includes a detachable plastic belt clip. But as one of the priciest iPod cases out there, it makes a few compromises inside and out that we wouldn't have expected. Piel Frama's \$65 standard leather cases are a better deal, if not as slick.

Silicone rubber cases. They offer thin, resilient protection - sometimes in different colors. Somewhat techie in appeal, they show off your iPod while covering virtually all of its body.

Power Support **Silicone Jacket 4G**



One of the best rubber cases out there is Power Support's Silicone Jacket Set (\$29.00) - a simple design that protects the iPod's body, screen, and Click Wheel controls. Separate versions for thin and thick iPods let you insure a proper fit - unlike some competitors. Only one color's available, but it looks nice and is made from high-grade, durable rubber. The resilient separate screen and control protectors shown here are included, and work quite well - the company's newer 3D Wheel Film protector is better. A thin hole at the top of the case permits attachment of top-mounting iPod accessories; we wish it was a little smaller.

Speck **ToughSkin**



A major twist on the rubber case theme is Speck's ruggedized ToughSkin (\$34.95), which adds considerably thicker bumpers to the iPod's corners and sides. Hard plastic screen and flip-open Click Wheel protectors are included to give the case virtually complete coverage. Speck also includes a hard plastic belt clip and large internal plate as a belt clip nub, which also helps size ToughSkin to different thicknesses of iPod. We felt okay but not great about the plate, and prefer cases that are individually sized to iPods, but this case looks good, and is highly protective save for its open top. Multiple colors are available for fashion-conscious ruggedizers. Unique and cool.

Power Support **3D Wheel Film**



Virtually every iPod case we've tested omits one key feature: Click Wheel protection. Though a few companies came up with partial Click Wheel guards, only two have developed smart detachable pieces that let you easily cover and still use the iPod's controls. Power Support's 3D Wheel Film (\$14.95) is one of them, and it recently just got better. Now the company includes two screen protectors and two improved Click Wheel protectors in each package. We use the Wheel protectors on our own iPods, and love them - their coverage is superb and resilient. iPod mini versions are available, too. A must-have iPod add-on.

iSkin **eVo 2 with Wheel Cap**



Canada-based iSkin's eVo 2 (\$29.99) is a comprehensively protective rubber and plastic package. Most of the iPod is coated in your choice of colored silicone rubber, and iSkin includes both a nice hard plastic screen protector and a soft plastic Wheel Cap to cover the iPod's controls. Unlike Power Support, iSkin includes a unique thin top surface that works with some top-mounting accessories without opening the case. But on the flip side, the eVo 2's belt clip isn't that great, the packed-in clear soft plastic case isn't too useful, and you can't use either the screen or Click Wheel covers when the case has been removed. It's only a hint or two shy of the ideal case.

Exercise, travel, and outdoor cases. Whether you want iPod music at the gym, on a plane, or underwater, there's a case made specifically for your needs. Our favorites follow.

Handstands iPak

We remain big fans of STM's Cocoon for the iPod, the nearly identical Mini version of which is reviewed in our iPod mini case section, but Handstands' iPak (\$39.99) is a highly viable competitor. Each iPak set includes two well-padded polymer cases, one to hold your iPod or iPod mini with a foam insert, and the other to hold your accessories. Mesh headphone pockets and good zippers make the cases easy to use, and you can choose whether or not you want the added bulk of separately carrying your power supply, a top-mounting accessory, and cables. A smart option and good value.



Eroch LiliPod

Eroch Studios' LiliPod (\$35.00) is the iPod's only truly waterproof case, and can be submerged in water (save perhaps scuba diving) without fear. But it has faded into the background in recent days, its design antiquated by newer and more appealing cases like the oPod. As a while two-piece hard plastic shell with a foam interior, the LiliPod more than resembles the generic watertight cases that protect cigarettes and other consumables. It affords no access to the iPod's screen, controls, or ports save a water-tight head-phone jack on its bottom (the iPod's placed upside down inside). A nice fabric necklace accompanies the case to permit its easy use at a beach or pool. But without a pair of waterproof headphones, its use is limited, even more so since you can't use a remote control or in any way change volume or songs. It may be the only waterproof iPod case, but a sequel's desperately needed.



Marware SportSuit Convertible



Marware's exercise-friendly Convertible case (\$39.95) comes in six colors for iPod and iPod photos. It's based on the SportSuit - a quality iPod case made largely from stitched neoprene and see-through plastic - but the distinctive concept is the detachable hard front protective flap that attaches with Velcro to the SportSuit's top. Slip the iPod into the neoprene case for everyday use, which has a hole to permit you easy access to the iPod's controls, then attach the hard flap only when you need the extra anti-scratch protection for the full front of the iPod. An armband and belt clip are included for the price, and go on or off as you prefer. It's a protective, smart, and fairly weather-resilient armband option.



We liked the Armband in Speck's SkinTight Armband (\$34.95, below) better, and found it more comfortable overall. But your iPod's protected by a SkinTight case, which isn't our favorite. Buy it if you have another silicone case, or don't care about screen/Wheel coverage. Owners of 40GB iPods will like the fit of the case less than owners of 20GB models, hence the two different grades.



Speck SkinTight Armband

Hard cases. Need something tough? These plastic and metal cases keep your iPod secure under conditions that other cases couldn't weather - military-grade protection, fairly priced.

Contour Design Showcase



One of the smartest hard plastic cases we've seen was last year's award-winning Contour Design Showcase (\$32.95), now available in separate versions for iPods and iPod photos. Each Showcase includes two clear hard plastic halves joined by a hinged white or black frame; thinner iPods use a nice soft foam insert for proper spacing inside the shell. A sleek hard plastic belt clip is also included, and easily attaches for those who want it. Top and bottom holes are properly sized, and a good locking latch on the right side of the case keeps your iPod very secure inside.

Only two things are missing: Click Wheel protection is absent, so you'll need something like Power Support's 3D Wheel Film, and Contour hasn't yet opted to produce these cases in the wide variety of colors once offered for its older iPod showcases. But if you like the black or white cases - which we do - you'll find this case to be a superb option, and one of the best values in iPod cases overall.



OtterBox for iPod 4G and iPod photo

Previously known as the oPod, the OtterBox for iPod 4G and iPod photo (\$49.95) is one of the most interesting iPod cases we've ever reviewed. Made by OtterBox, a company that specializes in highly resilient hard cases for electronic devices, the 4G case provides water-resistant (not waterproof) protection for your entire 4G or photo iPod. Made mostly from a hard white plastic exterior shell with a clear screen protector and frosted clear Click Wheel protector, the case seals shut with a rubber seam to keep water out. Both the iPod's controls and screen are highly usable, a major limitation of Eroch's LiliPod family.



But because the OtterBox doesn't fully seal the headphone cable pass-through hole at its top, it can't be dunked in water. It's a surprising omission, given that the company figured out an easily solution in its comparably priced iPod mini case. That aside, you can still use this OtterBox in the rain and at a beach, or drop it repeatedly on the ground without damaging your iPod. An optional armband (\$14.95) converts it into a dependable exercise companion, too, which though a bit heavier and bigger than other options is also more weather-resilient. Otherwise, you can belt clip it with the included detachable belt clip, which isn't bad but isn't anywhere near as rugged as the rest of the product. We consider the OtterBox for full-sized iPods a great case design, with only one limitation.

Aircraft-grade aluminum protection: **Matias' iPod Armor 4G/photo**

Next to sticking your iPod in a steel safe and throwing away the keys, Matias' iPod Armor (\$49.95) is the hardest-core protective alternative currently available. With the exception of two sets of small holes - one on the top, one on the bottom - iPod Armor encases every millimeter of your iPod in substantial, aircraft-grade aluminum. And we mean every millimeter, including the iPod's screen and controls, which you access only by flipping the front face of the Armor open from its bottom hinge. Many cases compromise, using hard plastic as a screen guard and leaving the Click Wheel open, but Matias markets this as a choice: total access when open, total protection when closed. Some people won't find this practical for everyday use, but others - particularly extreme athletes - will love it. A detachable rubber plug covers or exposes the iPod's Dock Connector, while the headphone port and Hold switch are always exposed. Because the case is compatible with every full-sized iPod ever made, the holes up top are larger than they need to be for current iPod owners, and the case's protectivity suffers a little. But not enough to preclude this from being a very good option for most of its intended users.

FM transmitters. If you can't make a direct wired connection from your iPod to a home or car stereo, these wirelessly send iPod tunes to any open FM radio station. But quality suffers.

XtremeMac AirPlay FM Transmitter



For two years, the biggest name in iPod FM transmitters was Griffin Technologies' iTrip (below), but then XtremeMac released its AirPlay FM transmitter (\$39.99). AirPlay is noticeably smaller, unquestionably easier to tune, and marginally more powerful than Griffin's long-running series iPod attachments. As of press time, it's the best iPod FM transmitter available.

In essence, an FM transmitter turns an audio device into a small wireless audio broadcasting station: you plug any FM transmitter into the iPod's headphone jack, and whatever you play is turned into radio signals that can be heard on nearby stereo systems. Primarily useful for those who don't have cassette decks or line-in/auxiliary input ports in their cars, FM transmitters share a number of common issues and are by no means as clean a listening option as those other options, but they've proved relatively popular nonetheless.

XtremeMac's new AirPlay manages to preserve almost all of the acclaimed iTrip's best features without compromising any of its performance. First, it's smaller overall than the iTrip, a small matte white and gray rounded nub that sits on the top left of a full-sized iPod. Second, despite its small size, AirPlay manages to include its own highly legible LCD screen above the two tuning buttons on its front face. Holding down a button scrolls quickly through channels; the AirPlay remains fixed on the channel to which it last tuned, but otherwise has no channel-specific memory. Third, like the iTrip, AirPlay draws power directly from the iPod's battery - a feature we liked even back in the days of older, low-capacity iPod batteries, and are even more inclined to appreciate with newer and better iPods. Power drain is virtually identical to the iTrip, which is to say that you'll notice a relatively mild diminution of a standard full charge when using the AirPlay for extended periods of time.

We always note that FM transmitters are inherently third-rate tools to make your iPod's audio play through a stereo system - cassette adapters and line-in connections are better. But as FM transmitters are concerned, AirPlay does well. Despite its smaller size, AirPlay manages to transmit a bit more consistently and strongly than the iTrip, working well at a distance 30 feet from the receiving stereo under optimal circumstances. Unfortunately, objects and walls separating AirPlay, iTrip, and FM radios diminished their performance.

On 90% of channels we tested, AirPlay had a slightly stronger signal than iTrip, and AirPlay did a commensurately slightly better job of overcoming existing stations. But our most interesting comparative results were achieved on local stations 89.1 outside and 104.7 inside - two clear stations, on which the two devices sounded essentially equivalent, though iTrip had more bass than the AirPlay, and AirPlay had a hint less noise when ideally located.

For constant users of the "shuffle songs" iPod feature, AirPlay isn't just better than the iTrip - it's a necessity to avoid annoying interruptions from the iTrip's channel-changing software. Everyone else will find the two similar in audio quality but radically different in ease-of-use. What a great miniaturization job.

A close second: Griffin's iTrip and iTrip mini

The iTrip (\$35.00) and iTrip mini (\$39.99) are the closest to FM transmitter visual elegance an iPod can get: shapely top-mounting add-ons that work like AirPlay, only with a bit of extra tuning inconvenience. There's no LCD screen; instead Griffin installs a collection of small audio tracks on your iPod, and you use them to change the iTrip's broadcasting station. If you like a little more bass in your music and don't mind the prospect that iTrip tuning beeps will randomly interrupt your "shuffle songs" playback, this is still a great product.

Cassette adapters. A step up in audio quality from FM transmitters, these adapters plug into home or car cassette decks, and are cheaper, too. They're not perfect, but they're good.

Sony CPA-9C Car Pack



Our top cassette adapter so far is Sony's CPA-9C Car Connecting Pack, a plastic adapter that fits into your car's cassette deck and plugs into either your iPod's headphone port or a line-out port provided by the PocketDock below or SiK's imp (next page).

It's built well and is often available for half its \$19.95 suggested retail. For the price, you'll be impressed at how clean it sounds by comparison with any FM transmitter. And Sony's option looks good in most cars because of its black casing.

Monster iCarPlay Cassette Adapter

Monster's iCarPlay (\$19.95) fits into your car's cassette deck, using an attached male audio plug to connect to your iPod's headphone jack (or better yet, the line-out port found on SiK's din, Belkin's Audio Kit, or SendStation's PocketDock). iPod music goes through the cable and into your stereo, sounding noticeably better in the process than it would through an FM transmitter, but not as good as it would if the iPod plugged directly into the stereo via an iPod2Car kit (below).



Like Sony's CPA-9C, iCarPlay crimps the iPod's audio only modestly, and most users will like the quality of the output, as we did. But it mightn't match your car's interior as well as Sony's black adapter. Regardless, it outperforms lesser competitors by a mile.

Direct line-out solutions. The iPod's cleanest audio comes from tiny pins on its bottom. These add-ons turn those pins into connectors that send awesome sound to your stereos.

iStore iPod2Car Line-In Kit

Compatible with a wide variety of popular vehicles, iStore's iPod2Car line-in kit (\$199.99) replaces your car's CD changer cable with an iPod connector cable. The result: pristine CD-quality audio straight from your iPod to your car's speakers - assuming your iPod's music is recorded at CD quality to begin with. You can position the cable virtually anywhere in the front of your car, and mount your iPod with an air vent or other mounting solution. Once it's connected to your iPod, the kit lets you control iPod playback through your existing dashboard and steering wheel controls, and provides charging power to the iPod at the same time.

Installation isn't hard for a person with sufficient confidence to handle, but many people will want to have the kit installed by auto professionals at a cost of around \$100. That's not a lot considering the improvement in audio quality you'll get from iPod2Car. But there are fuller-featured CD-quality options out now, and coming soon.



SendStation PocketDocks

SendStation makes at least three PocketDock iPod-to-standard data or audio adapters, and we've liked all of them. The company's FireWire & Audio Line Out adapter (below) serves as a tiny plastic replacement for Apple's larger Dock, providing a FireWire port and an audio line-out port. Lacking a USB port, this PocketDock remains ideal for car enthusiasts who hope to make their own in-car iPod set-ups with line-quality audio. The PocketDock (\$29.95) is smaller and more travel friendly than cheaper alternatives from SiK and Nyko, and comes with its own set of matching white audio cables, which we really liked.

Nyko Stereo Link Cable

If you need a simple way to connect your iPod to any amplifier or quality stereo, look no further than Nyko's Stereo Link (\$24.99). It gives you gold-tipped left and right RCA outputs, and a connection to the iPod's clean Dock Connector line-output capability. The only downer: you can't use it with Apple's Dock at all, so your iPod will lay on its back or require a mount.



Car chargers. Recharge your iPod while you're on the road - and listen at the same time. Our favorite car chargers provide line-out ports so you can access the iPod's cleanest audio.

SiK imp Car Charger with Line-Out



Recharging an iPod's battery in your car isn't exactly rocket science, but there are companies that have made dangerous chargers, and ones that have made safe chargers. SiK's imp (\$29.95) - a two-piece car charger - is one of the safe ones, and also one of the best we've tested overall. Unfortunately, it's sometimes hard to find, and floats in and out of backordered status.

The imp consists of two parts: first is a white Apple Dock Connector plug with two wires. One leads to a high-quality audio line-out port, the other to a FireWire port. If you have a cassette tape adapter or a recent car stereo with an "aux-in" port, you can connect it to this part of the imp for cleaner iPod sound than the headphone port musters. FM transmitter users will get no benefit.

SiK's other piece is a cabled white car charger with a male FireWire plug. When you connect both of the imp's pieces, your iPod can recharge in a car while outputting its best quality audio - something few other companies can offer.

SiK's use of a thin Dock Connector maximizes imp's compatibility with numerous iPod cases. And while the set of detachable white wires and components may or may not match your car's interior, they do provide you with the ability to separate the components for the din's use indoors - something that Belkin's comparable Auto Kit does not. For the price, the two parts together are a good value, and recommended.

Belkin Auto Kit

Despite its higher price tag, Belkin's Auto Kit (\$39.99) was one iPodlounge editor's top pick for a single reason: it doesn't poke out as much as SiK's imp from the car's power adapter port. Now there's another reason: Belkin's selling a black version of the Auto Kit that's more likely to match the interiors of dark cars.

Color aside, the Auto Kit is more or less identical in functionality to SiK's imp, but sleeker in appearance. Due in part to Belkin's iPod development collaborations with Apple, the Auto Kit manages to perfectly match the glossy and classy white plastic look of full-sized iPods, hiding a subtle yellow power light under the Belkin logo on its front. As a small nub protruding from your car's power adapter, it features only one dial - a volume adjuster for its built-in amplifier (not present on SiK's imp, or especially useful unless your car's stereo is terrible) - plus a port for line-out audio, and a cable leading to a male Dock Connector plug.

You plug the Auto Kit into your car and into your iPod, and then plug either a line-out audio cable or cassette adapter into both the Auto Kit's port and your car. As with SiK's imp, you're left with a mess of cables, but there's not as much sticking out of your car's power port. And while its Dock Connector plug is a little less universally friendly than SiK's, it works with most of the best cases. With colors taken into consideration, the Auto Kit is today the first car charger with audio we'd recommend to full-sized iPod users.



TEN Technology flexDock mini

The only car charging and audio-out option we prefer to Belkin's Auto Kit is available only for iPod mini owners. TEN Technology's flexDock mini (\$49.95) charges, outputs high-quality audio, and even mounts your mini in your car - the very best combination of these three features that we've seen. It uses a sturdy but malleable gooseneck that can be set in your position of choice, poking out of your car's power adapter and providing you with a clear view of your iPod mini's face.

Though it doesn't look anywhere near as slick as Belkin's competing and recently released TuneBases, we love the way the flexDock works and generally appreciate that its color matches dark car interiors, if not any iPod. And it sounds much better, too. But its included cassette adapter isn't good - you'll want one of Sony's, instead - and again, it can't be used with full-sized iPods. That makes it our top pick for mini owners.



Mounting solutions. Tired of leaving your iPod on your seat while you drive? The best of these mounts keep your iPod safe and clearly visible at all times, others just keep it safe.

Unless you have an iPod mini and can use TEN's flexDock to mount your iPod in your car, you have two choices: buy a car mount or leave your iPod someplace and hope it doesn't get damaged. Since the latter's not an option as far as we're concerned, finding a good mount was a must. After plenty of searching and testing, we found that for full-sized iPods, ProClip makes the best options we've seen.

The company's in-car mounts consist of two parts: an iPod holder that's sized specifically to fit a given iPod model (\$24.95-\$36.95), and a mounting bracket that's made specifically for the car you own (\$29.95-\$39.95). If you're like us, your first thought is probably "whoa, that's steep." But by comparison with the many "universal" mounts we've seen and tested, each of which is cheaper and looser than these mounts, ProClip's parts are guaranteed to fit - and fit well. All of the parts are made from heavy plastic, and are installed easily without the assistance of any automotive professional. You'll need a screwdriver to connect the two halves, but nothing more.

Our favorite ProClip iPod holder is the new Padded Holder with Tilt Swivel (\$36.95), which uses soft velvety padding to protect your iPod from insertion and removal scratches. Like the company's non-padded Tilt Swivel Holder (\$34.95), your iPod can be tilted 15 degrees in any direction or rotated 360 degrees, making in-car iPod viewing dramatically easier and potentially safer. ProClip also offers non-swivel versions of both the Padded (\$26.95) and unpadded (\$24.95) holders, which are fine if you don't mind moving your head a bit to see the iPod's screen.

Mounts are made for specific locations in different cars - most are \$29.95, and fit in front of one of your air vents, clasping more aggressively to your car than any of the universal solutions. ProClip's offerings use pressure on the frames of the vents rather than trying to secure themselves on the interior thin plastic slats, a substantial difference that improves grip and just plain works for vehicles that don't have horizontal vent slats. We recommend the center-located mounts rather than ones on the left or right sides of your car, only because these mounts are nicely coupled with car chargers and line-output cables such as the ones on the left page, and center-mounting avoids running those cables through your lap.

We're anxiously awaiting ProClip's next offering - an iPod holder that will hold an iPod that's inside of a silicone rubber case, so there won't be a need to pull cases off to mount iPods in the car. Until that's released, however, the company's current series of mounts is as good as you can get.

Less car-specific solutions: **Griffin's iSqueez** and **Nyko's Universal Car Mount**



Griffin's iSqueez (formerly PodPod, \$9.99) and Nyko's Universal Car Mount (\$29.99) represent the opposite side of the car mounting spectrum: they're not specific to any vehicle, or any iPod, and they make no promises that they'll be as perfect as the ProClip options presented above. But in some cars, and for some types of users, they'll work just fine - particularly for their low asking prices.

The iSqueez is a molded piece of foam rubber with two sides - one that fits iPod minis, one that fits full-sized iPods. You flip it around in your car's cupholder, deposit your iPod on a reclining angle, and connect top and/or bottom cables without a problem. Griffin's flexible design fits into pretty much any cupholder, won't scratch your iPod, and doesn't look too bad.

Nyko's Universal Car Mount is a more sophisticated design, using an all-plastic system with spring-loaded, locking sizes that firmly grasp any iPod save the shuffle. Top and bottom port access is permitted, too. You attach the Mount to your car with vent clips or an adhesive dashboard pad; the clips turn to grasp either horizontal or vertical air vent slats. While the look and position of the mount wasn't as perfect as ProClip's, it's good enough for most people - and cheaper.

ProClip In-Car Mounts



Headphones under \$60. Hundreds of inexpensive headphones are available for your iPod, but few of them match its distinctive body and colors. Our favorite picks are below.

Sony MDR-EX81 Earphones



A

Is there a universally acceptable, inexpensive alternative to the earbuds Apple includes with every iPod? No. Every person has individually shaped ears, certain sound preferences, and a budget. But after testing numerous low-end earphones, our current favorites are Sony's new MDR-EX81s (\$59.00, from Audiocubes.com): they produce clean, balanced sound at an affordable price.

We've been fans of Sony's earlier MDR-EX71s (below) on fit alone for years - they're the most comfortable earbuds we have used, thanks to silicone rubber inserts. They're even more comfortable than multi-hundred dollar custom fit earphones we've tested, in part because the components inside are cheaper and smaller, and don't sound anywhere near as good. Bass is strong but muddy and overexaggerated, with little clarity and definition in mid and low notes.

Sony has gone a couple of steps better with the EX81s. Now the earbuds don't just sit in your ear canals; instead, Sony uses flexible but not soft white rubber mounts that wrap around your upper ears and hold the white and chrome earbuds upside down in your canals with gunmetal-colored tubes. The buds twist a little to accommodate the shape of your ear, and almost instantly felt comfortable in our ears - just like the EX71s, we can forget that they're inserted once they're on. This mightn't be true for everyone, though: different ears might not be as comfortable with the over-the-ear mounts, and some people will prefer the simpler bud styling of the EX71s. But they'll definitely need to compromise a lot on sound quality.



We found the sound from the EX81s to be very close to optimally balanced. Most likely because most listeners prefer a richer, deeper sound to a crisp and accurate one, they lean a little more towards bass response than the neutral and expensive studio monitor earphones we've tested. But that's smart: the slightly warm EX81s are more likely to satisfy even discriminating listeners, at least in terms of their balance, while giving the "average" user enough bass to be satisfactory. The EX81s also have noticeably better treble response and less distortion at the low end than the EX71s.



And they couldn't be a better visual match for the full-sized iPod: if you thought you stood out as an iPod owner with the white cords, these offer just the right touches and quantity of white, chrome, and gray to accentuate what you're listening to. A two-piece cord separates for those who prefer not to have the extra dangle, and the MDR-EX81s even include a carrying pouch.

This isn't to say that they're perfect earphones. An intentionally uneven neck cord may bug some people; it didn't bother us. And compared against Etymotic's more expensive ER-6i Isolators (next page), for example, the EX81s sound flatter across the board, with less treble response, a more compressed midrange, and less differentiation in bass notes. But for \$60, they're wicked.

Good for the price: **Yahba Opus** and **Sony MDR-EX71s**



A-

Yahba's Opus (\$29.99) is a superior replacement for Apple's iPod pack-ins, and falls only a little short of the EX81s. Physically, you get the rubber ear molds of Sony's phones, but the oversized exterior plastic piping of Apple's. As a result, the Opus phones don't fit into your ears as completely

and snugly as the smaller EX71s do. But they provide a cleaner "thump" - still a solid quantum of bass, but now with crisper definition of bass sounds, and better treble response. Mids aren't as muddy, either. Increased clarity lets instruments sound far more distinct from each other than in the EX71s, too. They're a nice, cheap jump from Apple's pack-ins.



A-

Experiences with higher-end headphones have soured us only a little on Sony's MDR-EX71 in-ear buds (\$39.95), which for many people are and will be the most comfortable earbuds ever made. Their low price and bass-heavy audio endears them to younger iPod users, while the

passive isolation afforded by their rubber ear tips is a major advantage for all types of listeners. Other offerings deliver somewhat crisper, cleaner sound, but these will likely fit you better, and, if you like bass, meet your needs. Sony's now selling them in iPod-matching white, as well.

Headphones under \$150. One step up in price radically improves the clarity and balance of your iPod's sound. You won't believe the difference between these and \$60 earbuds.

Etymotic ER-6i Isolator Earphones



A

If you're willing to make an actual investment in headphones, your ears will thank you. While some people are unwilling to spend more than \$50 or \$100 on listening devices, the differences between the best \$60 headphones we've heard and the best \$150 ones are huge, and Etymotic Research's ER-6i Isolators (\$149.00) represent the pick of the litter in the latter category. They follow in the footsteps of the company's more expensive ER-4 series headphones (next page), last year's winner of our iPod Audio Accessory of the Year award.

If part of the appeal of any product is its beauty, the ER-6i earphones are an iPod lover's dream. With white and clear housings for their drivers, white cords and white rubber triple flanges that fit into your ears, they're as interesting to look at as they are to wear and hear. Five feet of cord guarantee that you can show off your iPod from a distance, and a simple thin white and gold-tipped headphone plug guarantees compatibility with any iPod case you might purchase. A white plastic clip right below the Y-joint of the headphones lets you attach the ER-6is easily to clothing, too.

Etymotic's silicone rubber flanges are more comfortable than average - not the equal of Sony's MDR-EX71s or EX81s, but better than most alternatives we've tried, including expensive custom-fit earphones. As advertised, the three ribs of rubber plug your ear canals, isolating music inside while blocking off outside noise. Etymotic's triple flanges do a better job than most if not all of the active noise cancellation systems we've tried, and don't require gigantic ear cups to achieve the effect. (Two foam rubber earpieces are also included for those who prefer to get a more personalized fit; we liked the flanges better.) The ribbed plastic carrying pouch is Etymotic's best yet, sleek and small.

Sound quality is exactly what it should be at this point in time for Etymotic's \$149.00 asking price: noticeably clearer than and decidedly preferable to the Sony EX81s we liked at a lower price point - say, 30-40% better - but not quite as clean and mind-altering as the more expensive ER-4 series, which represent a 20% or so further step up. The ER-6is provide generally balanced treble and bass response, plus clarity and a distinction between different instruments and voices that lower-end earphones rarely deliver. Critically, you do not have to turn the volume up to hear details in your music that you've never heard before; the ER-6is just deliver them to you, regardless of volume level. Bass is accented a little bit to satisfy low-end customers, but it sounds good, and won't elicit complaints from audiophiles.

Overall, the ER-6i Isolators look good, feel good, and sound great for the price. As with all headphones, spending more money will get you even better results, but we don't think there's a pair of \$100-150 headphones that sounds as good as these. You'll even want to keep them around for your next iPod.



Comparable Alternatives: **Shure E3c** and **Future Sonic EM3**



B

Like its competitors, Shure's E3c phones (\$179.99, available for \$130 and up) are inserted directly into your ear canals, forming a seal that keeps outside noise out. But Shure includes so many different earpieces that if you can't find something that fits your ears in the box, you may need new ears.

A great zippered carrying case is also included, with a cord winding piece of plastic inside. Better yet, the E3cs' sound is refined, especially in the mid and high ranges. We found the lows, mids, and highs to be consistently on-target: none were exaggerated or overpowering, and instruments were clear and distinct. A solid option, though not as much of an iPod match as the ER-6i's.



B+

Funny looking in a vaguely fleshy color scheme but great sounding, Future Sonics' Model EM3 (\$143.10) earphones deliver more bass-rich output than most of their upscale and "accurate" competitors. Two sets of foam in-canal inserts are included (large and small), and though they already provide ample

isolation from outside noise, custom-fit earpieces are available at an extra cost. The only downers: noise from movement of their cords can be heard in the earphones, so keep still or batten them down. And they regrettably don't try to match the iPod visually as much as a skin tone - and then one that won't match many prospective users' ears.

Headphones under \$350. If you want high-quality sound good enough to satisfy serious audio fanatics, you'll need to drop this much cash. But you'll never use cheap buds again.

Etymotic ER-4 MicroPro



A



Though we think Etymotic's ER-6i Isolator earphones offer great sound for the dollar, if we had to buy only one pair of earphones with our own cash, they'd be the same company's ER-4 MicroPros (\$330.00). While there is no question that listening to earphones differs from listening to living room speakers or a live performance, the ER-4s come very, very close to creating a facsimile. They provide astounding clarity, frequency response and faithful reproduction - an almost overwhelming sense of being purely "inside" the music.

When using a pair of these in-canal earphones (model ER-4P pictured), you'll want to re-hear every song you own to discover their hidden layers of sound: overdubs that were indistinct, voices hidden in distant backgrounds, and notes that were absent. The ER-4 experience is akin to hearing a re-mastered old favorite album: everything sounds richer, more distinct, and just plain better.

On a scale from "tilted towards bass or treble" or "balanced," the Etymotics define balance: their response just sounds real, and "right," without adding tin or muddle to the original sound. For this reason, the ER-4 series is considered "reference" grade by audiophiles, a performance standard by which other products are measured. While other companies' earphones may offer stronger bass, or enhanced treble, the ER-4 series is known as accurate.

How does Etymotic achieve this? As a hearing aid company, they know ears. Also, they put their drivers inside the ears, making your ear canal part of the device and effectively sealing you off (by ~25db) from outside noise. You can listen to music practically anywhere without having to turn up the volume so much that it would damage or desensitize your hearing. By contrast with cup-style phones, the ER-4s are compact, and easily tote along with your iPod. They come with extra soft plastic and foam inserts, which fit most ears comfortably, a carrying case, and an adapter to fit larger stereo component jacks.

There are three ER models: the B, which are Binaural; the S, Stereo; and the P, which is the high gain model. Having tested both the S and P models, the latter of which features higher gain for use with portable devices, it's difficult to discern differences in sound quality. We felt that the S model seemed a bit smoother in response, with a little more punch in the P.

Is there a catch? Yes; the price. At \$330.00, they will scare off all but the serious audio lovers we mentioned at the beginning of the review. But we have come to love the Etymotics over almost all contenders. Even Ultimate Ears' awesome UE-10 Pro earphones (\$900.00) offered only a modest improvement in sound quality, and then only in bass response. If we were stuck on an island with one set of headphones, these might be the ones.

Rich bass, big cups, little outside interference: Bose QuietComfort 2

Many companies advertise headphones with noise-cancelling technology, but precious few fully deliver on its single benefit: the ability to actively prevent you from hearing outside sounds, particularly low rumbling noises such as car and jet engines, the drone of washing machines, or low-pitched voices. Bose's QuietComfort 2s (\$299.00) mostly live up to their promise, delivering rich sound from your iPod while sealing off the world around you: look someone in the face and you'll barely hear anything they're saying. One switch turns the AAA battery-powered headphones on and off, and they'll run for around 35 hours under normal listening conditions. Plus, they won't fatigue your ears - they're lightweight and comfy, though large.

Bose includes a nice black carrying case, a headphone extension cable, and gold adapters to let you use the QuietComfort 2s with airplane audio jacks and high-end stereo equipment. Do they deliver more than the ER-4s above? Not really, unless you prefer cup-style headphones to in-ear buds or appreciate the warmth of extra bass in your audio. If so, they might be worth an audition.

A-



Headphones without price limits. If you're looking for the earphones that rock stars and recording studios use, and don't care how much they cost, these should be your top picks.

Ultimate Ears UE-10 Pro



A-



After winning over customers with their UE-5 and UE-7 series earphones, Nevada-based Ultimate Ears has released the UE-10 Pro (\$900), an ultra-high end, custom fit in-ear design that the company claims is the "most accurate earpiece available." Given that price tag and the quality they claim to be offering, it's not surprising that the company's web site lists a huge collection of celebrity and musician clients.

After testing the UE-10 Pros, we can verify Ultimate Ears' claims: these are awesome headphones, and in fact, the UE-10 Pro delivers the best audio quality we've ever heard. But the price tag - three times the price of a 20GB iPod - places them quite out of reach for most iPod owners. Why so much? Every set of UE-10 Pros is custom-fit to the buyer's ears during an appointment with an audiologist, who uses putty to make ear canal impressions. Those impressions are shipped to Ultimate Ears, and a week or two later, headphones arrive in a customized locking metal box bearing the buyer's name, along with a wax removal tool and an instruction manual.

Though the UE-10 Pros come in colors including iPod-matching white, they look incomparably cool when transparent. Three separate audio drivers are suspended in fully clear plastic, vividly showing the open-air sonic tunnels from drivers to eardrums. Matching clear cables intertwine, forming helices of sparkling metal that run nearly four feet from end to end. Ultimate Ears currently offers replacement cables in four colors - regrettably, not white.

Having tested numerous headphones, the UE-10 Pros are without question unstoppable as far as accurate, clean sound is concerned. They modestly top both the ER-4 series and Ultimate Ears' older UE5cs in fidelity, accurately reproducing not only highs, but noticeably giving somewhat fuller body to the mid- and low-range. Added bass is the UE-10 Pros' biggest gain over the ER-4s.

They're pretty comfortable, too. We both found the overall comfort level of the earphones to be surprisingly comparable to our favorite pairs of in-ear buds, despite their larger size. But custom-fitting mightn't be right for everyone: the UE-10 Pros aren't as soft as Sony's MDR-EX71s, or as easily removed from your ears as Etymotics. But they fit and isolate quite well.

Our praise is only a little qualified. Like the Etymotics we love so much, the UE-10s aim for accuracy rather than enhancement of the original audio source, and at some point you can barely get more accurate than the superb products that have come before. The audio difference between the \$900 UE-10 Pros and the \$330 Etymotics is very slight, though the price difference is profound. But if you can afford the very best, they're a personalized luxury you'll keep forever.



A

Up there, but not \$900: Shure E5c and Ultimate Ears UE5c Earphones

If \$900 for a set of UE-10 Pros shocks your pockets, Ultimate Ears' lowest-end UE5c earphones (\$550) are a better value for typical users. Though they have only two drivers per earphone to the UE-10s' three, the UE5cs sound 95% alike, and go through the same custom fitting process used across all of Ultimate Ears' more expensive offerings. The black ones pictured here are only one of the colors available - like the UE-10s, they can be had in white and clear. They're the same earphones inside as Shure's E5cs.



A-

For \$50 less, Shure's E5c earphones (\$499.00) use the same outstanding audio components but don't require you to visit with an audiologist for a fitting; instead, they include three sizes each of Shure's silicone rubber flex and ultra-flex sleeves, plus one set of foam sleeves, and now also include triple flanges like the ones shown on the Etymotic ER-4s. They also come in a gift-quality box and include a great soft carrying case. We're partial to the triple flanges, which isolate sound and fit pretty well, but even the best sleeves won't make them as comfy as properly fit UE5cs - or the smaller ER-4s, which are lighter and put less plastic in your ears. But if you're lucky enough to get a pair of the E5cs, you won't mind: their silky audio is rich, clean, and powerful. They're the hardest-core earbuds you'll find without an appointment.

Ultra-portable speakers. Super-small speaker systems trade off audio quality and volume for low prices and casings that can fit in your pocket. Ideal for one- or two-person listening.

Pacific Rim Technologies
Cube Travel Speakers



A



As far as small speakers are concerned, it's hard to go wrong with Pacific Rim Technologies' new Cube Travel Speakers (\$34.99): they're one of the smallest iPod-matching speaker systems we've seen, and also amongst the least expensive. If you need something that's easy to carry and has just enough power for one- or two-person listening, this is our top choice.

Powered by four AAA batteries for around 16 hours, the Cubes fold up into a 2.4" x 2.4" x 4" package - roughly the same dimensions of a full-sized iPod, but four times thicker. They're small enough to carry in the pocket of a baggy pair of jeans, or fit into the corner of any bag. An AC adapter (\$5.00) is optional.

Fully opened, the complete system is almost three times as wide as an iPod is tall, with a recessed space in its center that just fits any full-sized iPod without squeezing or scratching its sides. A small detachable plastic iPod cradle plugs into two holes next to the recessed center, and an integrated stereo audio-in cord unwraps neatly from the back of the Cubes to plug into an iPod's headphone jack. All iPods from shuffle to photo fit into the cradle, some more loosely than others.

One of the cool things about the Cubes is that there's nothing to say that you need to entirely unfold both of the speakers, or place them in any specific orientation. If you have less room, or don't want to carry the detachable cradle, you can pop open one of the speakers and rest the iPod on the other. Additionally, the Cubes can be easily used with top-mounting iPod wireless remote controls such as TEN Technology's naviPod and DLO's iDirect, and their volume buttons will fully work - unlike speaker systems with built-in docks.

As ultra-portable speakers go, we were impressed by the Cubes' sound. For obvious reasons, they perform best when they're entirely unfolded, and feature appropriate left- and right-channel stereo separation for their size, but are still usable when one of the speakers is obstructed by the iPod. At full extension, bass is much stronger and the overall sound balance is better with the Cubes. We didn't think the PodWaves were by any means too tinny for their small enclosure, but the Cubes are certainly even less so.

We also compared the Cube speakers against Altec Lansing's iM4 speaker system (\$99.99), which also runs off of four batteries (AAs), but is in a different class of speaker, and significantly larger and more expensive. While the iM4s sounded a bit richer, and could get a bit louder, the Cubes more than held their own, and didn't sound bad by comparison. They're definitely a more impressive feat for their size and price.

Overall, we really liked the Cubes' balance of features, pricing, and size. They won't win awards for sound quality against larger rivals, but they're the best ultra-portable speakers we've tested, and a great deal, besides.

Are those speakers in your pocket or are you just happy to see me? **Macally PodWave**



A-

At press time, there's no speaker option that's both as small and affordable as Macally's PodWave (\$39.00) - a tube that fits on top of your iPod and adds one left and one right speaker to its top sides. A single AA battery pops into a rear compartment and powers the system for eight hours. You adjust the volume with your iPod's controls, flip on or off the power switch, and enjoy the sound. We sure did - considering the size, we thought that it sounded great for one- or two-person listening. While it's outperformed on volume and overall sound by the Cube Speakers above and larger portable speakers, the PodWave is the single easiest solution to toss in your pocket. And it works with all of the iPods, including the shuffle. Only one word of caution: Macally's produced two versions of the PodWave, and the original, slightly smaller version's not as good. Avoid eBay or used units for this one and buy new and direct from a good retailer.

Portable speakers. If they run off of battery power and fit in a briefcase, they're truly portable speakers. Volume typically fills a room, and sound quality's good - not great.

Five different sets of portable speakers from Altec Lansing now share the inMotion name: the original inMotions, a discontinued blue pair called the iM2s (not shown), a deluxe version called the iM3s, a replacement for the iM2s called the iM4s, and an iPod mini-specific version called the iMminis.

If that sounds confusing, this should help: the iM3s, original inMotions, and iM4s are essentially the same speakers, descending in price based only on what's in between them. The iM4s (\$99.95, middle right) connect to an iPod only through the headphone port and don't include a charging dock; the original inMotions (\$149.95, middle left) include a charging dock but don't include a remote control, and the iM3s (\$179.95, top) include both a dock and the remote. Finally, the physically smaller iMminis (\$129.95, bottom) work only with the iPod mini, include a dock, and have less powerful speakers. (Note that the iM docks don't work with Apple's 60GB iPod photo - it's just too thick.)

All of the systems are truly portable: they fold up into flat packages measuring no more than 10.25" x 5.5" x 1.5" - generally less - and run off of four AA cell batteries for 18-24 hours. Each includes an AC adapter and some sort of travel-friendly protective item, such as a carrying bag or plastic speaker shield.

And while their sound quality is outstripped by all of the semi-portable and non-portable speakers on the next page, most listeners will find their audio at least acceptable. They have enough power to fill a medium-sized room, and tend to noticeably distort sounds only at high volumes - a slight hissing sound is present in all of them save the iM4s at any volume level. Since most people like bass, they feature artificially boosted bass response, which creates a fuller sound that will only be poooh-pooohed by audiophiles. We really prefer the less bass-heavy sound of the iMminis, but only iPod mini owners will buy them.

That aside, the other options are so similar that only the extras differentiate them. We really liked the iM3's remote control, which is one of the only ways to properly adjust a docked iPod's volume. The alternative is to buy the cheaper, dockless iM4s, an Apple Dock, and a third-party wireless remote - a more expensive proposition for sure. But if you don't need remote or charging features, get the iM4s. In any case, we'd skip the original inMotions - it's worth the small premium to step up to the iM3s, or the big savings to get the iM4s.

Altec Lansing **inMotion Series**



B+



B



A-



A-

Logitech **mm22** JBL **On Tour**



B



A-

The biggest benefit of Logitech's new mm22s (\$79.99) is that price tag: they sound pretty good at normal volumes, but don't charge the cradled iPod, and only connect through its headphone port. Four AAAs or its power adapter provided power, and a larger included carrying case is nice - but necessary if you want to take them on the road.

It matches the iPod, but doesn't hold it. If you can get around this limitation of JBL's On Tour (\$99.95), you'll probably prefer its sound to the other options on this page. And its styling, size, and other features are at least as nice: powered by 4 AAAs or an included adapter, On Tour's top casing slides closed to protect the speakers while you travel.

Logic3 **i-Station**

A portable speaker system with a subwoofer for extra bass? That's what Logic3 says. But at normal volumes, the i-Station's (\$149.99) third speaker doesn't deliver stronger bass than the subwoofer-free inMotions above; it only shines at loud volumes, and could have used a bass knob. The real draw of this option is the substantial discounting they receive: you can find them for \$85, making them the cheapest portable speaker system with an iPod dock so far, yet comparable in performance to all of the more expensive alternatives. They include a plastic speaker guard, AC power adapter, and compartments for four AA batteries. We like the blue LED lights that glow on either side of the dock when the power's turned on, too, but then, we're suckers for blue lights.



B+

Semi-portable speakers. You can't carry them everywhere you go because they either lack battery compartments or won't fit in a bag, but they sound better than true portables.



Under \$300: Bose **SoundDock**

We'll say it up front: as of today, there is no better sounding, dockable iPod speaker system than Bose's SoundDock (\$299.00). Its dock lets you plug in any mini or full-sized iPod - not the shuffle - and without any calibration, it puts out rich, pleasant sound. Picky audiophiles rap Bose products as pricey, but it's obvious why most people like Bose's products: they sound nice without having to fuss around at all. Similarly, a simple remote control is included, and also works wonderfully. The physical design is a bit stark by comparison with other options in this category, but isn't unattractive, and looks highly professional.

So why a B+? Primarily price and adjustability. At the cost of a 20GB iPod, the SoundDock is considerably more expensive than JBL's smaller On Stage (below), which sounds 90% as good. And it's three times the price of JBL's Creature II speakers (right), which sound at least equally good and feature full treble and bass controls. At almost five pounds weight, and carrying a 6.65" x 11.91" x 6.48" footprint, it's barely more portable than the Creatures, either, and as you can see from the comparison photo, the SoundDock and truly portable options like Altec's iM3s are not in the same size category. The SoundDock doesn't run off of battery power, and though it recharges your iPod when docked, it doesn't let you connect to your computer or non-iPod audio devices, both of which Altec's iPod-specific iMotion speakers do.

Spending our own cash, we'd pick the Creature IIs and an Apple Dock any day, but if you need a one-piece system without sound compromises, go with Bose.

Under \$200: JBL **On Stage**

What do you do when you know you've invented the best speaker system for the iPod? If you're JBL, you shrink it down, add an integrated iPod dock, and raise the price. On Stage (\$199.95) offers 90% of the Creature II's sound quality in a considerably more compact package, but like the Creatures, On Stage isn't portable - it requires an AC power adaptor (included) and is designed to sit flat on a desk. Four speakers are hidden under a silver metal grille, surrounding a set of touch-sensitive volume buttons and most iPods (save the iPod photo and shuffle) at front. There's also a port on the back so that you can connect your iPod to your computer while it's docked. But unlike the Creatures, you can't adjust the bass or treble. And there's no way to pop batteries in - a shame given On Stage's small size. It's not our first choice, but it's still a good one, and it becomes more attractive every time it's discounted at retail.

Under \$100: Macally **IceTune**

One of the best-looking iPod accessories we've ever seen is Macally's IceTune (\$69.99), a three-piece speaker system with an integrated iPod dock. The premise: you can stack the speakers and dock however you prefer, linking them in a tube to create a totem pole of sound or dividing them into pieces for true stereo separation. The dock is thankfully even compatible with thick iPod photos, and the blue ring of light beneath the dock only adds to the cool design. You can't find a cheaper dockable speaker system anywhere today.

There's only one caveat: don't expect the IceTune's sound to compare with any of the more expensive options we've listed. It's on the treble-heavy side, which some might call "tinny", and can't deliver the clean high-volume sound of the Creatures (right) or SoundDock (above). It's good for the price, okay overall.

Non-portable speakers. Once you buy these, they'll stay put and sound fantastic. If you rarely or never move your speakers, you'll strongly prefer the quality of these options.

iPodlounge has tested virtually all of the iPod-specific speaker systems released to date, and none compares in sound quality for the dollar to JBL's Creature II Speaker System (\$99.95, available for as little as \$50.00).

We always emphasize that great iPod speakers should deliver clean audio across the frequency spectrum from high (treble) notes through mid-range to low (bass). Surround sound is unnecessary; the iPod doesn't support it, so two-channel (left and right) audio suffices, so long as the speakers are adequately separated. While portability is a plus, most iPod speakers sit in one place and are rarely moved. And for most people, including us, price and value are key.

The Creature II system almost perfectly meets our requirements. Two small white and chrome iPod-matching satellite speakers provide crisp treble and mid-range response, while a large white plastic subwoofer creates rich bass sound. When turned on, cool lights glow underneath each of the satellites and next to the power button on the rear of the subwoofer; originally blue, the lights on current Creatures are green. Silver knobs on the subwoofer let you adjust the bass and treble of the system, while silver touch-sensitive buttons on the right satellite speaker adjust the volume. You can position the pieces wherever you want for a greater stereo effect; they're connected by cables. JBL's adjustable bass and treble guarantee you'll create sound you like.

Notably, the Creatures aren't portable speakers - they come with a power cube, won't run off battery power, and are only "portable" in that they're neither too heavy nor large to occasionally carry from room to room in a house as necessary. But then, a number of competing options either themselves aren't practically portable, or trade audio quality for portability, a bad compromise from our perspective unless you actually are always carrying your speakers.

The only thing really missing from the Creatures is an integrated iPod dock, which is featured in JBL's On Stage, Bose's SoundDock, and Altec Lansing's offerings, amongst others, but in some cases limits their use with the iPod photo. The Creatures are way cheap, include an audio cable, and work with Apple's Dock (\$39) or SendStation's PocketDock (\$29.95). Your total price will still be around \$100, and we're certain that you'll love the sound.

As a brief note for the style-conscious: JBL now also makes Creatures in a black color to match the iPod U2 Special Edition, as well as a gray color that replaces an earlier and better silver version. The black Creatures look dark purple under bright lights, but are still attractive; however, we're not fans of the gray, and advise caution if ordering from a merchant selling "silver." Readers have told us that they've ordered silver and received gray, and JBL confirms that silvers are no longer produced. It's a shame - they were the best alternative to white.

More expensive, but with metallic styling: **Altec FX6021 (left)** and **Klipsch GMX-A 2.1 (right)**



We haven't rated them because they don't match current iPods, but we've been very impressed by both Altec's FX6021 InConcert speakers (\$299.99, available for \$199 and up) and Klipsch's GMX-A 2.1 (\$149.99, available for \$115 and up). Sonically similar to the Creatures, but with more dramatic styling and greater horsepower for volume and bass, both systems sound great. Expect significantly larger subwoofers and satellites. The FX6021 includes a control box and remote control to adjust treble, bass, and volume; the GMX-A's box adjusts only bass and volume, without a remote.



JBL Creature II Speakers



Wireless solutions. Control your iPod from a distance or even listen to its audio from up to a room away. These wireless products only hint at what's soon to come for the iPod.

TEN Technology naviPlay Portable Wireless System



A-



Wireless phones have revolutionized communications; will wireless iPod accessories change the way we listen to music? A number of important companies are strongly betting "yes," and TEN Technology's naviPlay (\$199.99) is one of the first out of the gate, promising wireless access to your iPod's music from up to 30 feet away. Rechargeable batteries make it truly portable, a distinction from future products that are intended only for in-home use. You can use naviPlay for up to eight hours anywhere before the batteries die down.

Based on Bluetooth technology, TEN's small white transmitter attaches to your iPod with a plastic body clip and uses its Dock Connector port for output. An even smaller receiver half the size of an iPod becomes your own personal iPod shuffle: it includes a five-way joystick identical in layout to the shuffle's controls, as well as a headphone port and separate hold switch. You can wear it with an included gray necklace, or armband it with black fabric; it's light enough.

Toss your iPod into your backpack and use the receiver to access your entire music library on the go - with your favorite headphones. Mount the iPod on your motorcycle, and wear the receiver on your arm or neck. Or carry the iPod and listen to its music through your stereo system. naviPlay does all this, and more. TEN also offers a \$239.99 bundle that includes a pair of Hewlett-Packard wireless Bluetooth headphones, so you don't need to use TEN's receiver at all.

How does it sound? By comparison with Bluetake's i-Phono, an earlier Bluetooth system we tested for the iPod, it's comparatively clean and static-free. We found naviPlay difficult to distinguish from straight-from-iPod output using inexpensive headphones and typical in-car connections, with the flaws and differences only noticeable when using direct line-in car hardware and higher-end earbuds. Most listeners won't mind, especially outdoors.

Range was a bit spotty from test to test, particularly wherever metal objects could interfere with naviPlay's reception. In close-proximity use - carrying it on a belt, or in a bag - we never had a problem. Transmissions were clean and generally uninterrupted, and if we had a direct line of sight between the transmitter and receiver, 20-25 foot operation was fine. But when objects come between them, expect the range to drop by two thirds.

Overall, naviPlay is a cool but expensive way to make your iPod's entire music library accessible wirelessly. Future products may offer similar functionality, but for now, TEN has the best iPod wireless solution in town.

TEN Technology naviPro EX



B+

tracks and audiobook chapters without looking at the iPod's screen. A metal mount props up the iPod and infrared receiver.

Need a wireless remote control for the iPod? TEN's naviPro EX remotes (\$49.95) are the best we've seen. With models contoured to match iPods and iPod minis, the remotes let you switch between playlists, albums,

DLO iDirect Remote Control



C

mounts a similarly small receiver on the iPod's top. But no stand is included, and it needs a direct line of sight for guaranteed reception.

As between the naviPro EX and DLO iDirect, we had better transmitter experiences with the naviPro, but DLO's option is smaller and less expensive. It's like TEN's earlier naviPod in that it uses only five buttons to change tracks, volume, and play/pause status, and

Photo accessories. Transfer your digital photographs from memory cards or your camera directly onto the iPod's hard drive, then wipe the cards clean and keep shooting.

Belkin Media Reader



B+



Back before Apple announced the iPod Camera Connector, its peripheral partner Belkin developed the Media Reader (\$109.99), which as of press time remains the best way yet devised to transfer the contents of camera media cards onto an iPod's hard disk, and moots the need to purchase extra media or carry a large laptop for the same purpose.

The Media Reader is self-powered, connecting to the 3G or 4G iPod's Dock Connector port to transfer photos from CompactFlash, SmartMedia, Memory Stick, MMC and SD cards onto an iPod's hard drive. Those photos can then transfer easily from iPod to computer via FireWire or USB 2.0.

Transfers are easy. Apple has included software in the iPod that starts automatically when the Media Reader's connected. A menu called Photo Import appears, with an Import Photos option and lists of already-imported photos to choose from. Pop a media card in and one button press will transfer its contents. Then, you either choose "Done" and remove the card, or "Erase Card" to clean it entirely. Erasing has a safe confirmation screen and is accomplished fairly quickly, slowing based only on the number of files previously stored on the media card.

Like other quality iPod peripherals, Belkin's Media Reader matches the iPod's simple, clean elegance. Made mostly from shiny white plastic, the Media Reader's green LED flashes to indicate transferring activity. And it's only slightly larger than the iPod itself, with slight enough heft not to add any discernable weight to a bag. It uses AAA batteries, but the iPod's hard drive runs each time photos are stored. Serious photographers should also pack The iPod Battery ii.

In order to put something at stake when testing the Media Reader, we put it through its paces with an iPod during an extended tour of Japan, using multiple memory card formats, reading the cards, copying their contents, then using the iPod to erase the cards, frequently repeating this process after taking more pictures. Our cards and photos had no problems of any sort.

Photo transfer times were acceptable, not great. We found that the Media Reader transferred data from our Lexar 8X CompactFlash cards at a rate of approximately 4 seconds per megabyte, which meant a 50-Megabyte transfer took a bit over three minutes to complete. Serious photographers will want more speed, though casual users will find that the Media Reader accomplishes in minutes what would otherwise be expensive or impossible - the production of a completely usable blank memory card of equal size to one's current card, with storage of its prior photographic contents.

Though other non-iPod devices do the same thing, and some of them are fuller featured, Belkin's solution is less expensive - especially when Belkin's site has a half-off sale. We'll see how Apple's iPod Camera Connector compares.

Another option, with mixed results: Belkin's Digital Camera Link

As a follow-up to the Media Reader, Belkin's Digital Camera Link (\$79.99) is a mixed bag. On the positive side, it is media card agnostic - it connects directly to a camera and transfers files to your iPod without using a card reader. And when it works, it's substantially faster than the Media Reader. But it's not compatible with quite a few cameras, and it drains three batteries - camera, DCL and iPod - every time you use it. If you carry lots of spare batteries and check Belkin's site to ensure compatibility with your camera, consider it.



B

Chargers and batteries. Running out of juice? Keep your iPod running for over 55 hours with a battery pack, use current from an airplane, or even tap into the power of the sun.

Battery Technology The iPod Battery ii



A-



The king is dead; long live the king. Battery Technology Incorporated has discontinued The iPod Battery, iPodlounge's 2004 iPod Accessory of the Year, and mostly replaced it with the smaller, thinner iPod Battery ii. We say "mostly" because The iPod Battery was the only iPod add-on that added three full days of continuous play time to an iPod, and its sequel sells for the same price but runs for only two.

Only two days? In truth, in our tests with a fourth-generation iPod, The iPod Battery ii ran for 55 hours, 37 minutes before expiring, and actually ran for 49 hours and 20 minutes with an old third-generation iPod. Consider this: if you're traveling and won't be near a power outlet for extended periods of time, you may never need to find one if you use this battery. And even people whose internal iPod batteries are in rough shape may find this an easier and better option than opening their iPods up and doing a replacement. Recharging The iPod Battery ii takes 90 minutes, and most iPods around four hours.

The only caveat about The iPod Battery ii is its size. Though sleeker than its predecessor at 4 1/8" x 2.75" x under 0.75", it's still bigger and thicker than some of the thin-profile batteries made by companies such as Belkin and Nyko. It's made from full-sized iPod-matching white plastic, and attaches to an iPod's Dock Connector port. At the top, there's a "remaining power" indicator with four yellow circular lights, a button to turn that indicator on, a power on-off switch, and a collection of three variously sized iPod mounting brackets.

Thanks to those brackets, The iPod Battery ii works with 3G iPods, 4G iPods, and iPod minis. You can detach its built-in belt clip and attach it to one of the iPod brackets to use together on a belt - the original iPod Battery included a clip that couldn't be removed to slim the Battery down.

Given that no battery we've tested other than its discontinued predecessor comes close to The iPod Battery ii in runtime, and that many offer the illusion of lower cost by requiring you to purchase and replace AA batteries, it's easy to give this product a high recommendation. Owners of older iPods will especially appreciate its lasting power and value for the dollar. However, as iPods continue to improve on internal battery life, and smaller, thinner batteries begin to challenge BTI's products more on style than performance, it will be interesting to see whether people have as much need for big, bad batteries as they did in 2004. Regardless, we surely are glad we've been able to depend on these as our travel backups.

Dead battery inside your older iPod? **Newer Technology NuPower Replacement Batteries**



A

If preserving the size and look of your iPod is more important than radically increasing its battery performance, forget bulky add-ons and consider Newer Technology's NuPower series (\$25.99-\$39.95) of replacement internal batteries. Each one includes plastic tongs that you use to pop open your iPod's casing, as well as detailed instructions to help a non-techie iPodder remove a first-, second-, third-, or fourth-generation iPod's internal battery and replace it with something better. Better? Depending on the iPod model, Newer Technology offers from 20% to 70% more battery life than the batteries originally shipped by Apple. The "Super High-Capacity" first- and second-generation battery runs for 70% longer, while third- and fourth-generation batteries go for 30% and 20% longer, respectively. It's far cheaper than having Apple replace your iPod's battery if it expires under warranty, but beware: you'll need nimble hands to do it yourself.

If solar power were a 100% reliable form of energy production, every house, car, and portable device in the world would be covered in distinctive crystal-line ray-catching panels. Unfortunately, there are fairly annoying things called "clouds" and "seasons" that conspire to prevent continuous gathering of solar power. And of course, there's a big problem called "night."

For those living in or traveling to sunnier climates, U.K.-based Better Energy Systems Ltd. is offering Solio (\$99.99), the world's first iPod-matching solar powered charger. An iPod-specific cable is included, but using alternate cables (\$19.99 per set), Solio also works with other mobile devices, including popular brands of cellular phones and PDAs. In bad weather, you can use Solio like any other iPod battery pack, plugging it into the wall and recharging it for four or five hours. Under better conditions, you leave Solio out in the sun, it gathers solar power, and you don't need to plug it in at all.

There is plenty to like about Solio's design: its small size, generally white glossy plastic aesthetic, and light 5.8 oz. weight are just right for environmentally conscious iPod owners. Three solar panels unfold from a 4.7" x 2.6" x 1.3" package in a fan-like fashion, and since Better Energy decided not to package a mount with Solio, you're asked to stick a pencil through the center to prop it up on an angle that catches the sun's rays.

The only problem with Solio's solar charging is the one first mentioned in this review: the sun. We tested and re-tested Solio over the course of several days, and gave it plenty of time in direct sunlight. Better Energy says that Solio needs 8 to 10 hours of sustained sunlight to top off its internal battery, but on our first test, that wasn't enough to bring it past the 50% charged point. When we repeated the test another time on another set of sunny days, the results were better. On the first day, after five hours of time in the sun, the Solio showed a 50% charge. The second day, Solio was topped off at 100%.

Completely charged, Solio is capable of fully recharging an iPod's battery: our fourth-generation iPod showed a complete charge and ran for over 13 hours each time the Solio was plugged in. The same was the case whether Solio was charged from the sun or a wall outlet, though wall outlet charging was considerably faster.

Given that there are other options - such as BTI's iPod Batteries - that offer days of continuous rechargeable iPod power at the same point point as Solio, some may ignore this accessory as gimmicky. But we think that misses the point: energy conservation isn't always the most efficient solution in the short term, but it pays dividends in the long term. We recommend Solio particularly to people in sun-drenched areas, and those who may be interested in saving the world, just a little bit of natural energy at a time.

Better Energy Systems Solio Solar Charger



B+



Join the iPod mile high club. **BTI Auto/Air Adapter**



B+

Assuming that you're in an airplane's correct seating section - something you can plan in advance - Battery Technology Incorporated's new iPod Auto/Air Adapter (\$24.99) can keep your iPod running for as long as you're in flight. Made from two interconnecting pieces of iPod-matching white plastic, the power adapter doesn't charge your iPod, but it otherwise acts like a direct AC power source, keeping your music playing until it's unplugged. And it also works in your car, thanks to an adapter that twists off to plug into a cigarette lighter, but it wouldn't be our first choice for this purpose: many other car adapters offer both battery recharging and line-out audio through the Dock Connector port. If you're looking for another option, Monster makes the iAir Charger (\$29.95), which features an almost identical two-piece physical design, but with a black casing and Monster's oversized Dock Connector adaptor instead of BTI's better, smaller one.

Voice Recorders. It's easy and inexpensive to add recording capabilities to your iPod, but don't expect to create iBootlegs of concerts - these are strictly for lectures and dictation.

Griffin Technology iTalk Voice Recorder



A-

For most of the iPod's history, audio recording wasn't an option. That changed when Apple and Belkin co-developed the Voice Recorder, a small microphone peripheral that records conversations, lectures, and monologues - but not music. Soon thereafter, Griffin released the iTalk (\$39.99), a superior alternative that adds both obvious and subtle features to Belkin's design. The result is one of the best iPod accessories we've seen, limited only by Apple's software for the iPod. And we know that Griffin would do better if it could.

In the best traditions of Apple products and accessories, iTalk is a truly plug-and-play device: you pop it on to the iPod's top and a "Record" option appears on the iPod's screen. Click it and a red light lets you know that a microphone has activated, with an on-screen count-up timer to let you know how long you've been recording. When you're done, you press "Stop," and there's a recording on your iPod that is time and date stamped for later listening. Select the recording (from a list that grows as you record) and it plays back through iTalk's speaker. Simple.

Simpler, in fact, than Apple and Belkin's own solution. Thanks to automatic gain control, the iTalk doesn't need to be adjusted in any way if you walk into a lecture hall or try to record a conversation where you're one inch away from the microphone - it dynamically adjusts its recording to pick up whatever's going on in the room, no matter how large the room. Not so with the Voice Recorder, which lacks even a switch to adjust the gain.

iTalk also has a port for an external microphone and a pass-through headphone jack, features missing from the Voice Recorder and incorporated into Belkin's later and separate Universal Microphone Adapter (\$39.99), though you can't use both at once in the iTalk. No matter: iTalk has what both the Voice Recorder and Universal Microphone Adapter lack when combined: a superior built-in speaker and great microphone.

We were impressed by its crisp rendition of voices, and its apparent lack of noise when we listened through headphones. Ambient noise became more noticeable (though still not bothersome) at a distance of thirty feet from the built-in microphone, and it became hard to separate voice from background with that microphone only at around the 40 foot mark. With the right external microphone, this won't be a major problem. It's also worth noting that while iTalk's speaker outdoes Belkin's, it's still not great.

However, all three devices share a major limitation: the iPod is currently constrained to recording in monaural WAV format sound at a mere 8 KHz, which means that no matter how superb the microphone (or other audio source) you connect, the recording quality will always be comparatively low-grade, and because of the WAV format, will consume a megabyte per minute. Until Apple lets the iPod record in high-quality stereo with AAC or MP3, the iTrip and its competitors will fall short of their true potential.

First of its kind and second in our rankings:
Belkin's Voice Recorder

Belkin's Voice Recorder (\$49.99) isn't our favorite such iPod accessory, but it does have its advantages - it comes with a protective plastic headphone plug guard, is physically slightly smaller than the iTalk, and may be cheaper you order it during a Belkin half-off sale or find it at the right retailer. But in terms of raw recording and playback performance, we think that it's a clear notch down, and lacks a composite headphone and external microphone jack - so you'll need the company's separate Universal Microphone Adapter (\$39.99) for that.



B

iTunes Accessories. If you want to tap the full power of the iPod and iTunes, these add-ons will help you record radio shows, wirelessly broadcast iTunes music, and much more.

Is Griffin Technology's new RadioSHARK (\$69.99) an iPod accessory? If you've ever wanted to record FM or AM radio programs for later playback, you'll sure think so - RadioSHARK easily transforms radio broadcasts into iPod-compatible digital music files. Griffin bills it as TiVo for radio, and iPodlounge generally agrees.

Combining a large white fin, a chrome base, a USB cable and some software, RadioSHARK makes radio recording simple. Install the software on your PC or Mac, plug in the fin, and you'll pick up FM and AM radio. Like TiVo, you can easily "time shift" radio programming, pausing and rewinding live broadcasts, or creating VCR-style timed or recurring recordings of whatever you desire. Three lights on each side of the fin glow blue to indicate power, and red when recording.

While pause and rewind may be of marginal use on live radio, timed recording is unquestionably a killer feature - just ask any person who loves Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh, or NPR. Or ask any teenager whose favorite band will be performing on the radio at some inconvenient hour. With RadioSHARK, just set the timer and listen whenever you want.

Griffin's software keeps the process simple and clean - nicer looking on the Mac than on the PC, but otherwise functionally similar. We found channel seeking and equalization to be as simple as possible, with a list of EQ presets and 10 bands to tweak as you desire for bass, treble, and midrange. Best yet, RadioSHARK integrates with iTunes, automatically converting your recordings into uncompressed AIFF or compressed MPEG-4 (AAC) format, then dropping them into an iTunes playlist of your choice. Currently, you can record anything from pristine CD-quality audio down to highly compressed but still listenable audio (64kbs). At that bit rate, you'll need around 30 megabytes of iPod space per hour of radio - not bad, really, even if you have only an iPod mini's space to play with.

Our only real issue with the RadioSHARK was that in an area with plenty of radio interference, we had limited ability to cleanly tune AM and FM radio signals - an antenna issue. We fixed the problem by adding and coiling a USB extension cable, and Griffin subsequently added one to RadioSHARK boxes. The RadioSHARK's other limitations are relatively minor and are already being remedied by software upgrades; Griffin has a good track record of supporting its products. Even as currently sold, it does pretty much everything radio we've wanted for the last 15 years.

Apple AirPort Express



B+

If the iPod revolution will be wireless, the AirPort Express (\$129.00) could be one of its hubs. Surprisingly PC- and Mac-compatible, AirPort Express is a pocket-sized but complete 802.11B and G wireless base station and USB printer server, but those aren't its strong points for music fans. Apple's already developed iTunes, software that lets music from iTunes play through any speakers connected to the AirPort Express (using either a 3.5mm stereo audio cable or optical Toslink cable), and there have been hints from Apple that surround-sound iTunes support and eventually wireless iPod support may be forthcoming. Even if they don't, this is a cool and highly portable little product, if a bit expensive for its practical functionality.

Griffin Technology RadioSHARK



A-



Apple Computer Mac mini



If you want the ultimate iPod accessory, look no further: Apple Computer's new Mac mini equips you with the tools you need to make the most of your music, photos, and everything else in your life. And for the first time in Macintosh history, you won't need to feel guilty about the price. Apple's lowest-end (\$499) mini includes a 1.25Ghz PowerPC G4 processor and 40-Gigabyte hard disk. The higher-end (\$599) model has a 1.42Ghz processor and 80-Gigabyte hard disk.

Roughly the size of five CD cases stacked on top of each other, each mini is a stunningly elegant rounded aluminum and glossy plastic box measuring 6.5 inches square and 2 inches tall. Inside you'll find 256 Megabytes of RAM, a CD-burning, DVD-reading optical drive, a 56.6K modem, and ports for USB, FireWire, Ethernet, and video. Apple also sells customized Mac minis with DVD burning drives (+\$100) and wireless networking features (\$50-99) inside. You can get a mini with more RAM for \$75-325 more, or upgrade for less yourself.

But the cool hardware isn't the biggest draw: it's the included software. Besides Apple's rock-stable, virus-free Mac OS X operating system and iTunes, you get four superb programs to create movies, music, digital photo slideshows and DVDs - ones that would cost a thousand dollars or more to replicate on a PC. They're collectively called iLife '05, and explained on the next page.

There are only a few notable omissions. You're required to provide your own USB keyboard and mouse, as well as your own VGA monitor. Apple rightfully assumes that most PC users will have these already, and the ones we tested worked with the Mac mini just as they did on PCs. And most people will really want to have a minimum of 512MB of RAM (\$60), as well as a USB hub (\$5).

If you have a scanner, printer, keyboard or mouse that you purchased on the cheap, there's a fair likelihood that you will need to replace them. Non-USB versions of any of these devices just won't work on the Mac mini, and USB ones may or may not work. You might also want to buy additional software. Apple includes the AppleWorks suite with simple word processing, page layout, painting, spreadsheet, database and presentation tools for free, but serious PC converts won't be able to do without Microsoft's Office applications - for now.

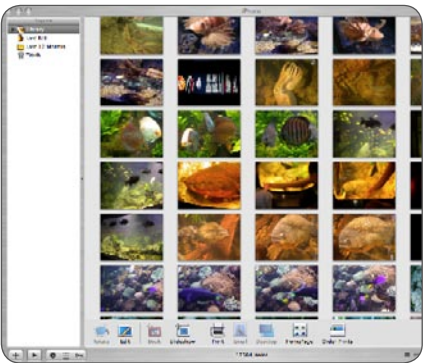
Having tested both 1.25GHz and 1.42GHz Mac minis, we'd go for the cheaper version, upgrade to 512MB RAM, and add a USB hub. You won't believe how much better the computing experience is than on a comparably priced PC, and you'll be ready for the next wave of iPod improvements, too.

We think Apple's finally created the computer of choice for millions of "average" people - students, grandparents, and iPod lovers considering a transition away from Windows. And once they've tried the Mac, they'll never go back.

Why should iPod lovers care? The Macintosh advantage

Leaving aside the Mac mini's lack of viruses, spyware and other PC problems, iPod owners will appreciate the Mac's enhanced version of iTunes and its superior integration with the iPod photo. On the Mac, iTunes' existing features can be expanded with AppleScripts (see inset) - programs that turn music organization chores into one- or two-click solutions. Need to download album cover artwork for all of your songs? Click Fetch Art. Need to copy your iPod music back to your iTunes library? Try Import iPod Audio Files. Want to transfer CD tracks to your iPod without filling your hard disk, or copy songs directly from one iPod to another? There are scripts for those, too. And they're free.

And thanks to the packed-in program iPhoto, iPod photo owners will have an even easier time organizing and transferring digital photos into iPod slideshows. iPhoto's Albums are easily created and loaded with whatever photos you desire, all shown as thumbnails; there's no need to buy Adobe's Photoshop Elements or another program to manage your photo collection.



1 iPhoto

Organize thousands of digital photos and make slideshows with simple mouse clicks. Then send them to an iPod photo, or burn them to a disc for later viewing. Powerful editing tools remove the need to purchase any additional software for your digital camera.



2 GarageBand

Create your own music with tools anyone can use. Export to your iPod, or create background tracks for iPhoto and iMovie. Stunning multi-track recording and editing rivals professional recording studios.

Apple's Secret Weapon: iLife '05

The Mac mini's killer app is a free pack-in: iLife '05 gives you the freedom and power to create and manage your own photos (1), audio (2, 3), and videos (4, 5). Of the five iLife '05 applications, only iTunes is available from Apple as a free web download.



3 iTunes

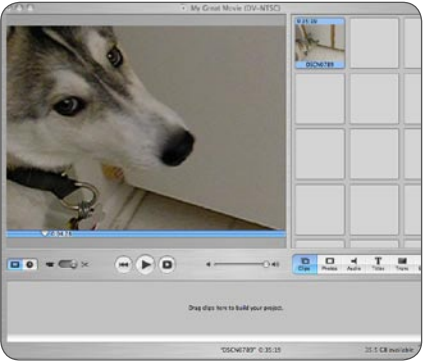


4 iDVD



Turn your iPhoto slideshows or iMovie videos into seriously professional-looking DVDs (with menus) that play back on any home television. There's no iPod use for iDVD yet, but it works wonders for your home movies on a DVD player and TV set.

5 iMovie HD



Edit videos made with your camcorder or digital camera and achieve pro results with amateur skill. A "magic iMovie" feature lets you create an edited movie from camera footage with one click. And it now supports HDTV. iPod value? Zero, for now.

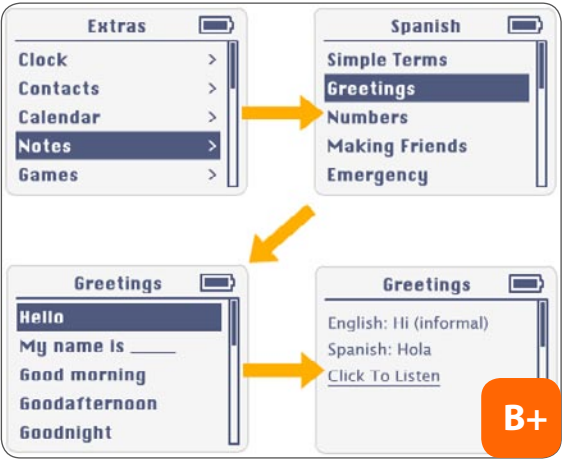
Tricking out your mini Accessories add gloss or glow

If you're like us, you loved Apple's discontinued G4 Cube computer, but wouldn't shell out \$2500 for it. Now PlasticSmith is offering the acrylic Mini Tower (\$49.95), which brings the Cube's good looks to the Mac mini, and the Mini Skirt glo (\$39.95), which alternatively adds neon blue or white lights to its undercarriage. Horizontal or vertical, the mini looks even better decked out with some extra plastic.



Software. Third-party software developers have created great programs that enhance the iPod's built-in capabilities. These are some of the best pay-for-play ones we've seen.

Talking Panda iLingo Translators



You're probably aware that iPods and iPod minis are capable of storing and displaying text files, but did you know that there's a way to link text files and audio clips together with easy-to-use menus? Talking Panda's iLingo "Language Translator for iPod" software takes advantage of that iPod feature, supplying text and audio translations of approximately 450 fundamental words and phrases for each of eight European and Asian languages. You can buy one language for \$14.95, or a four-language pack (French/German/Italian/Spanish or Japanese/Mandarin/Cantonese/Korean) for \$39.95.

You can see how iLingo works in the photos to the left. Select a category and phrase, then you get a text translation of both the English and translated language, and a "Click to Listen" link appears. Activate the link, and a clearly enunciated audio clip of the translation is instantly played in the background.

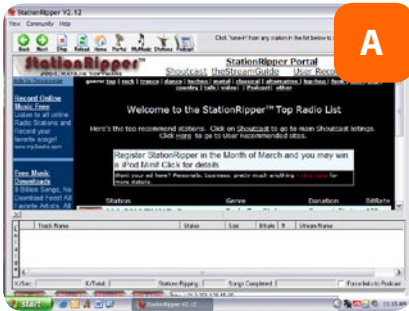
iLingo's phrase categories represent a comprehensive set of items any traveler would find useful: Simple Terms, Greetings, Getting Around, Numbers & Money, Mail, Phone & Internet, Time, Hotels, Dining, Shopping, Entertainment, Don't Understand, Emergencies, and Local Lingo.

How well does it perform? On the positive side, iLingo's installation is simple, and takes account of oddities in the iTunes installation process, properly managing the entire process of transferring its data into iTunes, and then onto your iPod. Navigation is easy, pronunciation is clear, and phrase choice is logical. Translations into languages such as Japanese appear in English, English-readable transliteration ("_____ewa doikeba il desuka?"), and Japanese characters, taking advantage of the iPod's multiple language support. In our opinion, therefore, Talking Panda's implementation of the translations and menu navigation system is absolutely as good as it could have been.

The biggest problem is that each language adds 480 very short audio tracks into your iTunes Music Library. Consequently, if you "Shuffle Songs", expect to have short foreign language phrases rudely disrupt your musical groove. And because of current iPod limitations, only one language can be installed on the iPod at a time, overwriting your Notes. While this may not be a significant hinderance to light travelers, multi-country trips will require the iLingo user to reconnect to a computer and install another language between countries.

Regardless, Talking Panda has done the best job that it could given the iPod's restrictions. Finally, there's a way to travel safe without looking like a tourist.

Want to record Internet radio broadcasts - assuming that you're allowed to do so? **Ratajik StationRipper**



If you used to sit by your radio with a tape deck to record your favorite songs off the air, you'll love Ratajik Software's StationRipper (\$14.99). As one of the most significant programs we've seen since the release of Griffin's radioSHARK, StationRipper is a PC-only application that lets you record Internet radio broadcasts with Apple-esque ease. You select a radio station using the built-in browser and StationRipper automatically starts recording, dividing up and properly labeling all of the tracks that have been played. The latest version even imports the tracks directly into iTunes so that you can sync with your iPod, hassle-free.

Ratajik's demo version lets you rip two stations at once, and performs miraculously well; the \$14.99 version promises simultaneous ripping of up to 300 stations at once, assuming you have the bandwidth. But resist the temptation to use this program for nefarious purposes.

Migo Personal for iPod (\$99.95) is an iPod-specific version of PowerHouse Technologies Group's powerful file synchronization software, which allows Windows PC users to "make any computer your own." The concept is simple: use Migo to synchronize your iPod with your home computer's desktop files, desktop image, Outlook email settings, Internet Explorer favorites, and any other files you specify explicitly. Connect your iPod to another computer, load the Migo program from the iPod's drive directly, and your documents, settings, email, and desktop wallpaper show up on the host computer as if it were your own. When you're finished, simply log out and walk away, leaving the host computer unchanged. If you made any changes, additions, or deletions, they are mirrored on your home computer the next time you synchronize.

(Apple Macintosh owners will recognize that this seems quite similar to the OS X 10.3 Panther feature "Home on iPod," which disappeared at the last minute without explanation. Mac users interested in somewhat of a Migo / Home-on-iPod solution should look to YouPod, a separate program.)

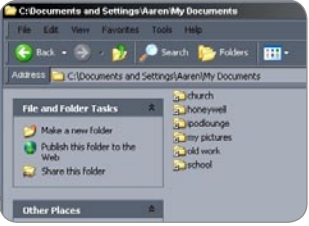
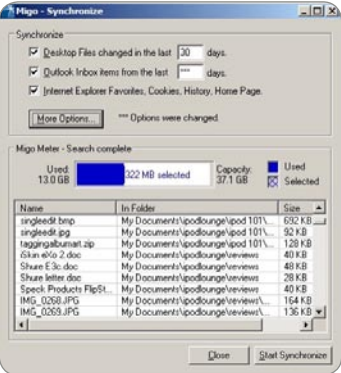
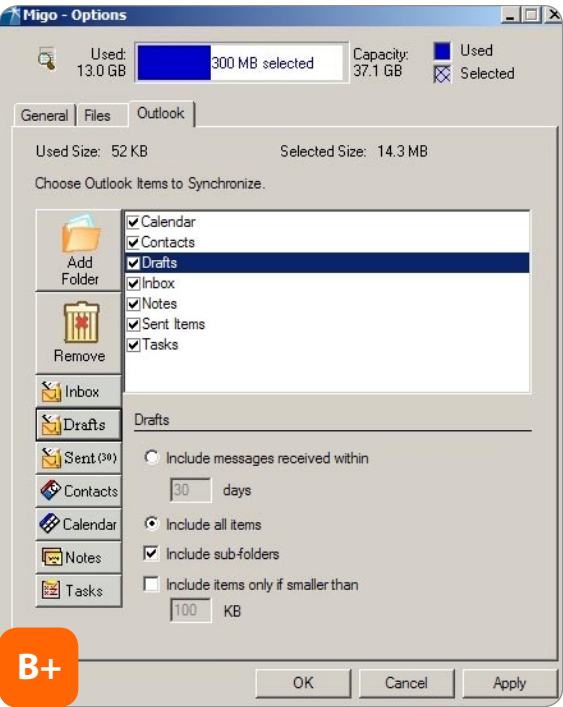
Sure, the concept sounds great, but how well does it work? In our testing, exactly as advertised. In short, Migo Personal for iPod fulfilled our expectations as a powerful, easy-to-use synchronization solution. The user interface was very intuitive - we had no trouble picking folders and files to synchronize, or making features perform as promised. Using a USB 2.0 connection on our 4G 40GB test iPod, our 350MB of file data took approximately 4 or 5 minutes for this initial synchronization. Subsequent "update-syncs" obviously take much less time. When the synchronization completed, we logged into our test "host" computer, logged in, plugged in the iPod, and launched Migo.exe off the iPod's hard drive. It should be noted that Migo does not allow you to gain access to a computer that you otherwise wouldn't have access to - you do need to be logged into a Windows account to launch the program.

Upon launching our "home" computer, the existing desktop image changed to our own, our desktop files appeared as shortcuts on the desktop, and shortcuts to our synchronized Documents folder replaced the existing user's "My Documents." Our Outlook 2003 e-mail, contacts, and calendar entries were properly imported into the host's Outlook 2000, and our Internet favorites were perfectly in place, as expected. To stress the file synchronization features of Migo, we added files to the iPod's Documents folder, deleted some that were already there, and made changes to others. We then logged out - which returned the "host" computer perfectly to its initial state - and returned to our "home" computer. Everything worked as it should have worked.

However, there are two potentially major drawbacks to Migo that may significantly limit its appeal to a large portion of its prospective users: third-party software support and price. The e-mail/contacts/calendar features, for example, require that all computers used have Outlook 2000, 2002, or 2003 installed. Outlook Express, which is likely far more pervasive on potential "host" computers, does not qualify. Similarly, the web browser used for bookmark synchronization must be Internet Explorer 4.01 or greater. The second of Migo's flaws is its price. Despite Migo's quality and broad feature set, there is no denying that its \$100 price tag is steep. Professionals may be able to justify the expense, but the price may limit its penetration among a significant segment of Migo's theoretical market: students transporting items to and from campus computers. Perhaps a "Lite" version is in order.

These drawbacks aside, we definitely recommend Migo Personal for iPod to any individual who has a strong need for seamless portability of his or her workspace. Its ability to effectively and easily transform virtually any computer into one's own is a major productivity gain for any person who is willing to pay the premium price. If the features sound appealing, a 15-day trial version is available at www.migoforipod.com/trial/. We think you'll be impressed.

PowerHouse Migo Personal



The iPodlounge Report Card. Over 300 excellent reviews dating from the iPod's 2001 launch to today, summarized in one simple table.

Adapters and Cables

SendStation PocketDock Combo	A
SendStation PocketDock	A-
Better Energy Systems Solio	B+
Capdase Universal Power Adapter	B+
Nyko Stereo Link Cable	B+
SendStation FireWire & Line Out	B+
Global Source Retractable USB/FW	B+
Apple iPod USB Power Adapter	B
Gadget Accessories USB Sync Cable	D

Batteries

BTi's The iPod Battery	A
Newer Technology NuPower Super 1G/2G A	A
BTi's The iPod Battery ii	A-
Newer Technology NuPower Hi-Cap 3G	A-
Tekkeon myPower Battery Pack	B+
Nyko iBoost mini Battery Pack	B
Belkin Backup Battery Pack	B
Belkin TunePower	B-
Gadget Accessories Battery Pack	F

Bluetooth Wireless

TEN Technology naviPlay	A-
Bluetake I-Phono BT420EX	B

Car Mounts

Nyko Universal Car Mount	A-
Power Support Mobile Stand	A-
ProClip In-Car Mount for iPod photo	A-
ProClip Padded iPod In-Car Holder	A-
ProClip in-car holder for iPod	B+
Griffin PodPod/iSqueez	B+
Pro Fit Ultimount	B
Belkin TuneDok	B-
HandStands iGrip Sticky Pad	C-

Car Power Chargers, Kits and Adapters

TEN Technology FlexDock	A-
BTi Auto/Air Adapter	B+
iStore iPod2Car Line-Quality Integ. Kit	B+
SiK imp in-car charger/line out	B+
Dension ICE-Link Auto Integration Kit	B+
Belkin Auto Kit	B+
Sony CPA-9C Car Connecting Pack	B+
DLO New TransPod FM (Dock Connector)	B
Griffin PowerPod	B
Incase Charger (Version 2)	B
Monster iCarPlay Cassette Adapter	B
Monster Ultra Low Profile Charger	B
Belkin TuneBase	B-
Monster iCharger	B-
DLO TransPod (for original iPods)	B-
Belkin TuneBase FM	C+
Dension ICE-Link 1.1 Auto Integration Kit	C+
Griffin RoadTrip All-in-One Car Solution	C+
XtremeMac iPod Cassette Adapter	C
Macally iPodCarCharger	D
Gadget Accessories 3-in-1 Travel Charger	B+/F

Cases - iPod 4G/HP/photo (Click Wheel)

STM Cocoon case	A
Vaja i-Volution 4G with Wheel Protector	A
Contour Design Showcase	A-
Handstands iPak Set	A-
iSkin eVo 2 with Wheel Cap	A-
Marware CEO Classic 4G	A-
Marware TrailVue 4G	A-
Marware SportSuit Convertible	A-
Miyavix Kimono	A-
OtterBox oPod 4G/photo	A-
Power Support Silicone Jacket Set	A-
Speck Products ToughSkin	A-
Lajo eXoflp	A-

Acme Made The Wallet	B+
iSkin eVo 2	B+
Capdase Flip-Top Leather Case	B+
ezGear Clear Case	B+
Proporta Crystal Case	B+
DLO Jam Jacket	B+
Matias iPod Armor 4G	B+
Pacific Rim Technologies 4gShield	B+
Timbuk2 iPod Case	B+
Tunewear Icewear 4G	B+
Tunewear WaterWear 4G	B+
Lajo eXo 2 / eXo2fb	B+
Speck Products 4G SkinTight Armband	B+/B
Capdase Soft Jacket	B
Gadget Accessories Solid Cover Case	B
Lajo eXo / eXofb / eXo iPodArt	B
Lajo eXo 3x	B
Piel Frama Luxurious Leather Case	B
Rivet iGrab	B
XtremeMac Silicone Sleeve	B
Speck Products SkinTight 4G iPod Skin	B/B-
Apple iPod Socks	B-
Be-Ez Travel Bag	B-
Incase Designs Leather Sleeves	B-
Rivet iGrab with QR Belt Clip/Dash Mount	B-
DLO Jam Jacket Pro	B-
Power Support Crystal Jacket 4G	B-
Agent 18 Click Shield	C+
DLO Action Jacket 4G	C+
Lajo eXo3	C+
Marware SportSuit Basic	C+
Acme Made The Traveller	C
Lajo Zip4g b	C
Lime iPod Peel Cases	C
Mobile Juice Skin Art 4G	C
Pacific Design Pouch	C-
Gadget Accessories Aluminum Case	D

As a fully independent resource of information on Apple Computer's iPod portable digital media platform, iPodlounge has provided impartial reviews of iPods and accessories since the 2001 release of the first-generation iPod. Because of a strict separation between the business and editorial sides of iPodlounge, and our strong belief in the value of an objective resource for iPod owners around the world, our reviews are in no way influenced by advertising revenues or outside concerns. We have no ties to any manufacturer of iPod accessories, and no agenda other than the promotion of a safe and happy global community of iPod lovers.

We welcome public comments on our reviews from our readers, as well as descriptions of their experiences (similar or different) with the products we have reviewed. Though we occasionally have to remove comments made by viral marketers and other sneaky individuals with competing business agendas, we continue to appreciate the positive contributions of our readers to our reviews.

Cases - iPod mini

Vaja iVod mini	A
Power Support Square Type Sil. Jacket	A
Lajo exoflpmini	A
OtterBox for iPod mini Waterproof Case	A
STM Mini Cocoon Travel Case	A
Tunewear Prie Classic Face Case	A
Capdase Metal Case for iPod mini	A-
Handstands iPak Set	A-
Matias iPod Armor mini	A-
Marware TrailVue	A-
Miyavix Kimono	A-
iSkin mini	A-
Kate Spade mini iPod Cases	A-
Marware SportSuit Convertible	A-
Contour Design iSee-mini	A-
Lajo exo3mini	A-
DLO Jam Jacket & Pro mini	A-
Pacific Design iPod Mini Flip Case	A-
Power Support Crystal Jacket mini Set	A-
Speck Products Mini Arm Band	A-
Agent 18 Mini Shield Case	B+
Agent 18 Mini Shock Case	B+
Eroch Lili mini Waterproof Case	B+
H2O Audio SV-iMini Underwater Case	B+
Innopocket Metal Deluxe Case	B+
Lajo exo2mini	B+
Lajo exo2mini-fb	B+
Marware Santa	B+
Speck Products Mini FlipStand	B+
Tunewear WaterWear mini	B+
Vaja Classic case	B+
Capdase Flip Top Leather Case	B
ezGear Clear mini Case	B
Rivet iGrab mini with Lanyard or Clip	B
Innopocket Magnesium Case	B
Sena Detachable Flip	B
Tunewear Icewear	B
Speck Mini iStyle	B
iLeath Mini Print Case	B
Incase Handcrafted Leather Sleeve	B
Global Source Deluxe Leather Case	B
Marware Safari	B
Speck Products Mini Skin	B
Matias Clear iPod Armor mini	B
Capdase Soft Jacket	B-
DC Shoes / Incase Sleeve	B-
Gadget Accessories Aluminum Case	B-
Marware MetroVue mini	B-
Marware Basic	C+
Marware Runabout	C+
Lajo exomini	C+
DLO Action Jacket mini case	C+
Bird-Electron POCO	C
Proporta Crystal mini Case	C-/D-

Cases - iPod shuffle

Apple iPod shuffle Sport Case	A
Power Support Silicone Jacket Shuffle	A-
Apple iPod shuffle Armband	B+
Pacific Rim Technologies Gel Shield	B+
Pods Plus Leather Cases	C+

Cases - 3G iPod (with Dock Connector)

Contour Design Showcase	A
Lajo eXoflp	A
MARWARE C.E.O. Classic 3G	A
STM Cocoon case	A
Vaja i-Vod 3G	A
iSkin eXo2 Case	A-
Self Design BodyMask	A-
Gravis G-Pod	B+
Otterbox oPod	B+
iSkin eVo	B+
Matias iPod Armor	B+
Lajo eXo 2 Case	B+
Teski Roadie Case	B+
Marware CEO Glove 3G	B+
Eroch Studios Lilipod Waterproof Case	B+
Speck Products iSport	B+
Power Support Silicone Jacket Set	B
Teski Executive Leather Case	B
Lajo eXo 3	B
RadTech PodSleevez	B
Incase Sleeve 3G Case	B
Lajo eXo and eXo Inferno Cases	B
Terforma iSleeve G2	B
Monster iCase Travel Pack	B
Piel Frama Leather Case	B
Speck Products FlipStand 3G	B
iLeath Leather Print Case	B-
Speck Products iPod Skin	B-
MacAlly PodCase Armband	C+
CaseClosed iPod Cases	C+
JAVOedge Design 1	C
Tune Belt iPod Armband Carrier	C-
Monster iSportCase	D+
Proporta Aluminum iPod Case	D-

Cases - 1G & 2G iPods (no Dock Connector)

Vaja i-Vod	A
MARWARE C.E.O Classic Case	A
Incase Designs Pouch	A
XtremeMac Deluxe (New & Improved)	A
MARWARE SportSuit Convertible	A
Krusell Classic Case	A-
iGlove Leather Case	A-
XtremeMac Deluxe (Original)	A-
Waterfield Designs Sooper Dooper	A-
J.R. Hill & Co. iPod Sleeve Deluxe	A-
Matias iPod Armor	B+

Contour Design iSee	B+
Groove Jacket	B+
MARWARE SportSuit Sleeve	B+
Vaja Classic Case	B
Incase Designs Sleeve	B
OP/TECH USA MP3i Pouch	B
The Pouch MP3 Player Carrying Case	B
Belkin iPod Case	B-
NeoPod Neoprene Case	B-
Speck Products FlipStand	C+
Xigma Leather Case	C+
Willow Design BiFold Case	C
Krusell Handit Case	C
OWC Pod Protector	C

Cleaners & Polishes

iCleaner	B
Ice Crème	C+

Clips and Cord Managers

Audio Outfitters earPod Earbud Case	B
Sumajin SmartWrap Cord Manager	B
Lajo TwistClips	B-
Hook Industries BudFrog	D+

FM Transmitters

XtremeMac AirPlay FM Transmitter	A
Griffin iTrip mini	A-
Griffin iTrip	A-
Belkin TuneCast II FM Transmitter	B+
C. Crane FM Transmitter	B+
Monster iCarPlay FM Transmitter	C+
Dr. Bott iPod Connection Kit w/ FM Trans.	C
Irock! Wireless Music Adapter	C
Sonnet Podfreq FM Transmitter	D+
Newer Technology RoadTrip!	D

Headphones & In-Canal Earphones

Ultimate Ears UE5c Custom Earphones	A
Etymotic Research ER-4S Earphones	A
Sony MDR-EX81 Earphones	A
Etymotic ER-6i Isolator Earphones	A
Bose QuietComfort 2. Noise Canceling	A-
Sennheiser MX500	A-
Sennheiser PMX60	A-
Shure E5c Earphones	A-
Ultimate Ears UE-10 Pro Earphones	A-
Sony MDR-E888LP Fontopia Earphones	A-
Sony Fontopia MDR-EX70/71LP	A-
Yahba Opus Earphones	A-
Shure E2c Earphones	B+
Future Sonics Ears Model EM3 Earphones	B+
Altec Lansing inMotion iM202 Earphones	B
Macally Noise Reduction Headphones	B
Sennheiser PX200	B

For a complete explanation of our letter grade rating system, please see page 52 of this Buyers' Guide. Information on our earlier, icon-based rating system is available online in issue one of the Buyers' Guide.

Headphones & In-Canal Earphones, cont'd

Shure E3c Earphones	B
Apple iPod In-Ear Headphones	B
Macally Retractable Headphones	C+
Griffin EarJams	C+
HeadRoom iPod Earphone System	C
Altec Lansing iM302 Headphones	C-
JAVOedge retractable earbuds	D

Headphone Expanders

Macally PodDuo Headphone Adapter	A-
XtremeMac Audio Splitter	B+
Simpl Acoustics A1 Audio Amplifier	C

iPods

Apple 3G iPod 15GB	A
Apple 2G iPod 20GB Mac	A
Apple iPod photo for All Users	A-
Apple 4G iPod: For New iPod Users	A-
Apple iPod from HP for New iPod Users	A-
Apple 2G iPod 10GB PC	A-
Apple iPod shuffle for New iPod Users	A-
Apple 4G iPod: For Power Users	B+
Apple iPod from HP for Power Users	B+
Apple iPod mini 1G: For All Users	B+
Apple iPod mini 2G: For All Users	B+
Apple iPod Shuffle for Power Users	B

iPod Hardware Expanders - General

Griffin RadioSHARK	A-
Belkin Media Reader	B+
Apple AirPort Express	B+
Belkin Digital Camera Link	B
Griffin iBeam	B

Microphones & Microphone Adapters

Griffin iTalk	A-
Belkin Voice Recorder	B
Belkin Universal Microphone Adapter	C+

Remotes

Apple Remote (for Dock Connector iPods)	B+
TEN Technology naviPro EX	B+
Nyko iTop Button Relocator	B
TEN Technology naviPod	B
DLO iDirect Wireless Remote	C

Software

Ratajik StationRipper	A
Migo Personal for iPod	B+
Talking Panda iLingo Translation Software	B+

Speakers

JBL Creature II 2.1 System	A
Pacific Rim Cube Travel Speakers	A
Macally PodWave	A-
PodGear PocketParty	A-
Altec Lansing iMmini	A-
JBL On Tour	A-
JBL On Stage	B+
Bose SoundDock	B+
Elecom ASP-700i Speakers	B+
Logic3 i-Station Portable Speakers	B+
Macally IceTune	B+
Altec Lansing iM3	B+
Tivoli iPAL	B+
Altec Lansing inMotion	B
Logitech mm22 Portable	B
Monster iSpeaker Portable	C-
DLO iBoom (Version 2)	D-
DLO iBoom (Version 1)	F

Stands (Docks & Cradles)

Power Support Metal Gear Stand	A-
Power Support Swivel Fix Stand	B+
ModPod	B+
Sonance iPort In-Wall Docking System	B+
Apple Dock (for Dock Connector iPods)	B
Apple iPod shuffle Dock	B
Pacific Rim Technologies iCradle	B
Bubble Design Habitat	B
PodStand	B
PodHolder	B
Westshore Craftworks iDockCover	B
DVBasLtd DVBase	B-
Thought Out iPed	B-
Power Support Metal Gear Simple Stand	C+
BookEndz iPodDock	C
iPodCradle	C

Stickers, Guards, and Film

Frontfield iPoDonut Wheel Protector	A-
iSkin Wheel Cap	A-
Power Support Crystal Film Screen Prot.	A-
Power Support 3D Wheel Film	A-
JAVOScreen	B+
Hewlett-Packard Printable Tattoos	B
Power Support Wheel Film	B
MacSkinz Podskinz	B
SkinEFX iPod Stickers	C+
Tunewear Poptune Stickers for iPod mini	B-
Capdase SkinGuard Stickers for shuffle	C

colophon

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Technology

Production and page make up on two dual-2.0GHz Apple PowerMac G5 desktop computers, one equipped with Apple 30" Cinema Display HD and the other with Apple 20" Cinema Display, one 1.5GHz PowerBook G4 laptop computer and one 1.42GHz Mac mini desktop computer. Powered by Bhangra.

Special Thanks

To our families for their continued patience as we assembled this Guide, to our editors, forum administrators, moderators, helpers and contributors for their help and contributions, and most of all, **to all of our readers for your continued support and participation in our community.** We sincerely appreciate your time and your many warm comments.

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Since 2001, the world's leading resource for iPod news, reviews, forums, photos, guides, tricks, software, and much more.

Review grades are provided only as a convenient summary of the comprehensive reviews we publish online. The complete archive of reviews for all of the products above is available on our Reviews page (ipodlounge.com/reviews.php). We also spotlight new reviews on our main page several times each week, and make an effort to review products by as many different accessory makers as possible. If you have any questions regarding our reviews, please address them to jeremy@ipodlounge.com.

iPodlounge Backstage

The Editors' Blog

Launched in July of 2004, iPodlounge Backstage is a place for our Editors to talk about news stories and products that are either indirectly related to the iPod or too hot to post on the site's main page. Dedicated Backstage readers often find scoops and teasers for information that won't appear on the main site for hours or days, as well as the Editors' personal commentaries and insights.

Wireless music, house-wide: Sonos delivers ZonePlayers with very familiar, exciting remote controls



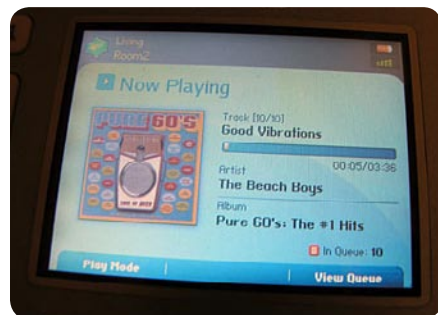
Over the next several years, more and more people will convert their vinyl, tape and CD collections into digital music files that can be enjoyed everywhere they go. But they'll still want to listen to music at home.

Our feeling - one shared by Santa Barbara-based Sonos - is that the next wave of home audio buyers will not want to be bound by wires and traditional oversized stereo components. Instead, they'll want to store all of their music on a single small device and be able to listen to whatever they want, wherever they want in their homes.

With the Digital Music System, Sonos is attempting to enable that reality today. The building blocks are ten-pound, roughly 10"x 8"x 4" boxes called ZonePlayers (\$499), aluminum and plastic amplifiers that you set up with speakers in each room of your home. To keep things simple, the ZonePlayers each have only three buttons (volume up, down, and mute) and use fantastically easy spring-loaded posts to connect your speakers. But they don't store your music; you need a separate device for that.



Although ZonePlayers can connect to your PC or Mac and play music stored on your hard disk, the smarter option is to add a \$150-\$400 standalone hard drive, eliminating the need to keep your computer on at all times. Once you've picked a music storage device, you can connect up to 32 ZonePlayers to each other without using wires. Want to play 32 songs at once from the hard drive? Go for it. Or play the same song in all 32 rooms. It's your choice. Music sounds as clean as the original source materials, and the ZonePlayers do a good (though not house-shaking) job with volume. If you don't mind lower-fidelity audio, the Sonos system can also be patched into your home's existing wired computer network, thereby gaining access to a huge collection of Internet Radio stations.



You'll most likely want at least one of the iPod-style remote controls (\$399, shown left) that let you tell each ZonePlayer what to play. Each uses an impressive 3.5" backlit color screen that displays album art and very familiar menus, and there's even an iPodesque touch-sensitive scroll wheel. Not surprisingly, the controls are shockingly simple to use. In our tests, it was highly easy to find and pick songs for individual rooms using the remote controls. From component to component, Sonos's design works quite well - it's what Apple might have done, and for that matter, still might do.

On that note, Sonos only omitted one critical feature, and then, not by choice: the ZonePlayers can't currently play back iTunes Music Store downloads (all 300+ million of them), protected WMA files, or songs from RealNetworks' Rhapsody. The company's working on adding support for both protected WMA and Rhapsody, but Apple's support is a real long shot. Consequently, the ZonePlayers aren't truly iPod or iTunes compatible.

We feel reasonably confident that an alternative to Sonos's system will emerge eventually from Apple, but for the time being, the ZonePlayers closely represent the future of in-home digital audio: simple and wireless.

Does packaging matter? Newcomer Nyko outshines numerous competitors with smarter boxes



Though the iPod's a winner on ease-of-use, too, there's no doubt that its looks matter. Now accessory makers have to figure out how to match or enhance Apple's cutting-edge product designs and packages. Nyko's new to the iPod market, but it quickly figured

out how to riff on Apple's style. In both packaging and accessories, Nyko uses more transparent plastic, hints of color, and at least one "wow, that was smart" idea per item. It's a welcome change from the rushed-out-the-door designs we see too often these days.

Is this where Apple is headed? Sony's PlayStation Portable is released, inspiring future iPod speculation

When asked in April 2004 about Apple's plans for a video iPod, Apple CEO Steve Jobs explained that the company's motto was, "it's the music, stupid." But with Microsoft and Sony pumping resources into devices that hold music, movies, and digital pictures, Apple unexpectedly released the iPod photo. Suddenly, an iPod that played more than music wasn't a dumb idea.

The iPod photo may just be the start. Over the last several months, Apple has been recruiting game and video experts for its iPod division, and even picked up a refugee from Microsoft's Xbox Live team. Are downloadable games, movies, and/or TV shows next on the iPod's hit list?

Not if Sony has anything to say about it. The company's new PlayStation Portable ("PSP", \$249.99) is designed to pre-empt Apple's multimedia moves. PSP can't touch the iPod's music acumen, and as a movie player, it won't live up to most people's expectations, but as a portable game machine, it is excellent - iPod-inspired casing only helps its appeal.

PSP's biggest draw is its 4.3" widescreen LCD display, which is as dissimilar to the screens of Nintendo portable consoles (and iPods) as possible: it's like holding a thin computer monitor in your hands, and astonishingly beautiful for gaming purposes. While numerous dead pixels are the norm on these screens, Sony claims they're not a defect, as they're only visible during slow movie and still image playback - not fast-action game titles.

The PSP's 3D capabilities and games are equally strong. While it's not the first handheld game machine to display 3D graphics, it's the first to do so convincingly. Hardware-pushing driving games and sports games are not only fun, but look like PlayStation 2 games - Nintendo's GBA and DS are comparatively aged. And as Sony's working with essentially all of the world's leading game studios, a steady flow of good games is certain. Our shot to the right shows the great driving game Ridge Racers; UBI Soft's Tetris-style puzzler Lumines is superb, and Sony's futuristic hovercraft racer Wipeout Pure is also very good.

However, PSP is too large to carry in a pocket, and Sony's decision to include an updated MiniDisc player (called UMD) instead of DVD or a hard disk has caused headaches. PS1 and 2 games won't work, so you'll need to spend \$40-50 for each new game. And disc access eats battery life, so typical PSP games run for around five hours; movies get closer to two. Music playback off of memory cards consumes less power, but you need to buy Memory Stick Pro Duos separately: a mere 1 GB costs \$120+. And putting movies, photos and music on the PSP is a chore, as is using them.

Since Sony has said that it will soon release an improved PSP that remedies some users' complaints, we think the console's a wait-and-see product at this point for everyone except hard-core gamers. Banner mainstream titles such as Madden Football and Grand Theft Auto aren't available, and Sony hasn't worked all the kinks out of the hardware and software yet. Until they do, there are better ways to spend \$249.99, and who knows what other and better options may be available by then?



The 100-Word iPod Story Gallery. iPodlounge readers submitted their true stories on the theme: “how did the iPod make a difference in your life?” We wish we could have picked more than two prize winners.

1st Prize

Low on gas, I was desperately trying to find a gas station in a rural area. My iPod was plugged into my iTrip, and sad Beatles' music was playing in the car. No. The car started decelerating, and I pulled over to the side.

Help! started playing. Yeah, I need help. When I got my cell phone out, there was no reception. To my surprise, somebody pulled over. She told me she was tuned to 89.7 FM (my iTrip station), heard the Beatles' song, and thought I needed help. So the iPod saved the day. Oh, the lady did, too.

Ici Li
Rockville, Maryland

2nd Prize

My sister, Caroline, is a competitive gymnast. The emotions she experiences are, unfortunately, something she feels compelled to share every day.

My sister had been eyeing my MP3 player for some time, so, upon placing first at a particularly important meet, she asked, “May I have an iPod?” My mother was all for the idea but my father's wallet was not. They decided to get her a shuffle.

Ever since that iPod reached my sister's hands, the earbuds have been in her ears and her mouth has been silent. Undoubtedly, that shuffle saved both my family's hearing, and our sanity.

Elisabeth Morant
Chicago, IL

Other Cool iPod Stories...

The iPod is a magical device, especially for those times when it really makes a day...

One day, listening to music in ho-hum English class, I found myself sitting next to another iPod user who I had never talked with much. My book was tedious, to say the least, so I posed a question to my neighbor, “Want to trade iPods for a few minutes?” “Sure,” he replied. I took his iPod, and plugged my headphones in. At that time, I looked back.

We were playing the same song. To say the least, we talk about music a lot now.

Kevin Brown
Walnut Creek, CA



Who would have thought a white marvel of technology could bring a family together? I've experienced it first hand, because my mother, brother and I are iPod owners, and this provides a new bond. While our iPods are almost as different as our taste in music; we share! We share iMixes, tips and tricks and sorrow (when we have a low battery). We gleefully chatter about the latest accessories and we rib each other when one of us scores a new iPod toy, while the others look on longingly until it's their turn. With any luck, I'm next in line.

Lisa Konie
San Jose, CA

I recently got a part-time job and, with the money amassed, decided to buy an iPod. It arrived at the beginning of half-term, so I had a week off school. I also had one 5-page long essay, one 1500 word Shakespeare essay, one Maths exam and two Russian. By the end of the week I had managed one Russian essay and half a maths exam. Parents' evening takes place the second day back and I am screwed because all I did was make kickass playlists, play Music Quiz and fall asleep listening to Bloc Party. Damn iPod.

Alex Richman
London, England

The Apple iPod has become a huge part of my life. I knew it was always important to me, because I always had it with me. I listen to it in the car with my iTrip, walking and skateboarding around my school campus, and through my stereo. So last week I was hanging out at a friends house and when I got home it was gone, I felt violated. So I went to the Mac store, spent all the money I had, and bought a new iPod. That's when I realized the iPod changed my life.

Cody Osborne
No address provided

My wife and I enjoy moonlit walks in a local park, which has numerous trails that wind through woods. One evening, with twilight coming, we stepped off the trail for a snuggle. Sitting down we proceeded to kiss. Suddenly, a raccoon leaped directly in front of us startling me so much my arm caught my wife's diamond necklace yanking it off. It was so dark we couldn't see anything but then my trusty iPod came to the rescue. I went to our car, came back and utilized the backlight to find her necklace in a minute. Boy was she grateful!

Jeff Young
Jacksonville, NC

Being an overweight male in my late teens wasn't exactly easy. Unable to live up to society's expectations to look a "certain way," I often found myself depressed, disappointed, and alone. Nearly a year ago, I received a 20GB iPod as a gift and I can honestly say that it has changed my life forever. iPod combined my love for music with the need for good health by giving me the motivation to begin running and exercising daily. For the first time in my life, I'm getting in shape, energetic, and feel comfortable and confident with myself. Thank you, Apple.

Chris Sullivan
Troy, NY

Not only has my iPod allowed me to listen to the music I want, but it also has completely changed the way I experience it. I sometimes spend hours at a time searching for new music to download because as an audiophile it is my duty to fill my iPod, to get to song number ten thousand. It's a daunting task but the journey has been life changing and along the way not only have I experienced new music, but new people and cultures as well. The possibilities are endless and now so are my horizons.

iPod, I love you.

DJ Roe
No address provided

Arriving late from work, I took the bus alone from downtown Toronto up to the suburbs, miles away from civilization. There were no streetlights, only complete darkness. I had brought my iPod to listen to on the bus ride home. When I had arrived at roughly my destination, it was almost pitch black, and I still had a very long walk to my place. Remembering that I still had my iPod, I turned it on and let its soothing LED lead me to safety. Had I not brought it with me, I wouldn't have made it home safely that night.

Tom Deutch
Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada

My grandmother woke me up for a day at the mall. It was Sunday and too much to bear. There was one thing that kept me motivated, and that was buying a new iPod. Once at the mall, I walked into the Apple Store and I bought it. I wanted to go home and use it but my grandmother was taking her time. I got desperate and opened it. My grandma, being attracted to shiny things, begged to touch my new "cellphone." I gave in and let her hold it. She let it drop. Now I know iPods aren't grandma-proof.

John Beauchamp
Miami, FL

Until I was blessed by the great device known as the iPod I had no connection to music. My father has quite a collection of music, well over 300 CDs and I didn't understand how anyone could have that much music. I never listened to much music, I didn't like the radio, disliked music television, and rarely listened to music I owned. This all changed when I bought an iPod, I started listening more, respecting all types of music, and was inspired to start seeing live shows. I am glad the iPod has allowed me to stop wasting my ears.

Nevin Styre
North Kelowna B.C. Canada

The last six months transformed my life. Before, I cringed at the thought of religion because my views of them were cultish. Commonly, I shared inappropriate jokes and comments crossing the line with some faithful friends. My world, however, changed thanks to Yoga and my iPod. On my graduation day from Yoga Teacher Training, I reflected on my developed passion to learn about myself and my place with spirituality. With meditation, the mantras on my iPod are forever there to calm the mind and focus the innerself. Yoga opened my path to spirituality, and my iPod has been my vehicle. Namaste.

Carlson Hui
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Have you ever gone through a breakup and found yourself so miserable that you lose touch with yourself? I was dumped in October. Has rejection ever hit you so hard that you self-destruct? I lost my friends. I almost lost my life. I definitely lost my will to live. I quit listening to reason. I noticed I even quit listening to music. I got my iPod in February. With it, joy returned. It didn't save my life. I had to do that myself. But it sure as hell helped. And now I have one constant in my life: my music.

Carl Sannito
Chicago, IL

Special thanks to the sponsors of this contest: EarphoneSolutions.com for the Shure E5c earphones, Audible for the one-year membership to Audible.com, and Griffin Technology for the radioSHARK and AirClick accessories. Congratulations to our winners, and thanks to everyone else who submitted stories for the contest!

iPod, a white and chrome rectangular box. Four letters that mean so much in my profession as a teacher, athlete and coach of Ice Skating! Having earned a US Championship, the mantle that passes from competitor to instructor has come to me. Music is the genesis of skating... Routines choreographed to showcase a skater's talent all begin with the roadmap that it portrays. My iPod, like a trusted friend, is with me every day... Organized with my students' programs, plugged into the arena's sound system, allowing me to continue the tradition of sports education, from one generation to the next...

*Douglas Mankovich
Germantown, MD*

iPod has changed my life. I commute two hours each way to work and have a tough time with radio reception. I got my iPod and now iTrip gets me to work without a headache from static. This lets me function through my day and the iPod gets me through my workout and doing so on a daily basis. Since I have been going to the gym, I have lost two inches and twelve pounds, down to 187 pounds and 35 inches. This changed my health for the better, as well as it has made my wife happier.

*Brady Smith
No Address Provided*

iPod is all my music, everywhere. iPod is my photographic portfolio, everywhere. iPod is a personal backup of all the data of my companies clients, everywhere. iPod is everywhere. Before iPod there were different devices, for different purposes. iPod is the ultimate solution in today's informational and multimedia society. For me, iPod is the ultimate solution combining size with size, style and versatility. Before iPod all of my pockets were filled with objects ranging from an MD-player to an organizer. Now everything sits perfectly inside my left jeans pocket. iPod is the multimedia-revolution of the 21st century. All around, it's everywhere.

*Maykel Loomans
Maastricht, Netherlands*

Since first coming out, I've dreamed of having an iPod. Its sleek design, snowy white color and amazing features made it a must-have for me. You might have already read this from other submissions, but my life with my iPod has changed completely. Now that I have all my favorite songs with me, I can stress out anytime I want to. With its gigabyte memory, I became addicted to file storing. And, organizing my life became easier, thanks to its contacts and calendar features. Now, I hardly forget anything important. My iPod made my hectic life easier and less complicated.

*Emily Jane Barriga
Marikina City, Philippines*

This may seem shallow, but I can't really think of many things I own that I value more than my iPod, not because of what it is or what it does, but what it taught me. I've always looked at it as a thing of beauty, getting frustrated with every scratch, that is, until the day I dropped it. I couldn't repair the damage, but I learned to accept it for what it was. Its substance, function, and purpose became so much more important than its condition or appearance, and so did everything else in my life.

*Jonathan Bennett
St. Francisville, LA*

At dawn, all the lights are turned on in the house, and three eager travelers pack the VW New Beetle, and a tiny 1968 Eriba Puck camper completely full of food, clothing, car show display items, and a pair of iPods.

As the key turns and the Beetle growls to life, the iPods in their chargers awaken and glow... alert and ready to entertain us. It is time for us to drive 2200 miles with the Eastern caravan to the annual New Beetle show in Roswell, NM.

Most of our friends have iPods, and we share songs over our FRS radios.

For five days we play all of our cheesy roadtrip songs through the boiling south. Our favorite: "The Biggest Ball of Twine in Minnesota" by Weird Al.

Evenings are filled with Bill Bryson tales. My daughter is in her own world; her iPod loaded with everything from the pop that preteen girls love to the Ramones, her newest passion.

The air conditioner dies in Texas, the last leg is spent with the sunroof open, the little bug straining, and Alpha Team's Speed Racer (all three mixes) bringing us tired, sweaty and wildly excited over the last hill into Roswell.

Not once did my kid complain. Mission accomplished.

*B.J. Kiefer
Cumberland, MD*

Music motivates me. I often find myself in situations where music is the catalyst that allows me to perform acts that I would ordinarily be unable to do. I work in an emergency veterinary hospital, and the other night one of our critical patients crashed. I began chest compressions, but tired quickly. I remembered my iPod on my hip, slipped my earphones in, and quickly tuned to some upbeat rock, and managed to keep on with the compressions. The patient, a ten year old Labrador, was revived thanks to my efforts and the efforts of the other technicians.

*Brad Root
San Diego, CA*

Though the iPod affected my life in oh so many ways, most influential was how the iPod had sparked my passion for music. Before I made my first acquaintance with the iPod, my collection of music was rather small, though it had its fair share of musical gems. From the beginning the iPod changed the way I listened to music, and since that day I've been taking my music wherever I go. It wasn't long before my thirst for more artists and genres grew to gigantic proportions. Nowadays I'm fighting for the last bytes left on my iPod.

*Or Sharir
Qiryat Tivon, Israel*

Standing in the enormous airport line, driving through the plaza and hitting every stoplight are little things which tarnish a beautiful day. One electronic device, the iPod, has become a tarnish remover for me as it allows me to have a beautiful day when before it would have been miserable. No more am I restricted to the same mainstream songs that play on an ad-cluttered radio. With 20 Gigabytes of space I can listen to whatever genre, depending on my mood. Like all things in life, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. My beauty - the iPod.

*Karin Yohe
Liberty, MO*

We were formally introduced nearly a year ago. United by a minister of postal ordeals, on the porch in front of my house. Since that day, she has never left my side. She is always at arms' length. She loves to talk, but only when I am ready to listen. I touch, she responds. And when I do, she speaks sweet nothings in my ears all day long. Even though everybody wants her, and she could get any guy she wanted, it feels as though she was created just for me. My one and only. My beautiful iPod.

*Dave Onishenko
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada*

Purchase an iPod? You must be kidding! I said that two years ago. Now, our family of five owns five! Why? Apple made it easy, inexpensive and legal to download my favorite tunes, upload CDs, organize them in iTunes and copy them to my iPod. Apple teamed up to make accessories for my iPod so I can take my tunes everywhere - in the car, to a party, while exercising or relaxing at home. No more bulky CD players or cases, listening to bad songs, or fearing your children have illegal music. So, "iPod-icize" your family. You won't be sorry!

*Brenda Manley
Newtown Square, PA*

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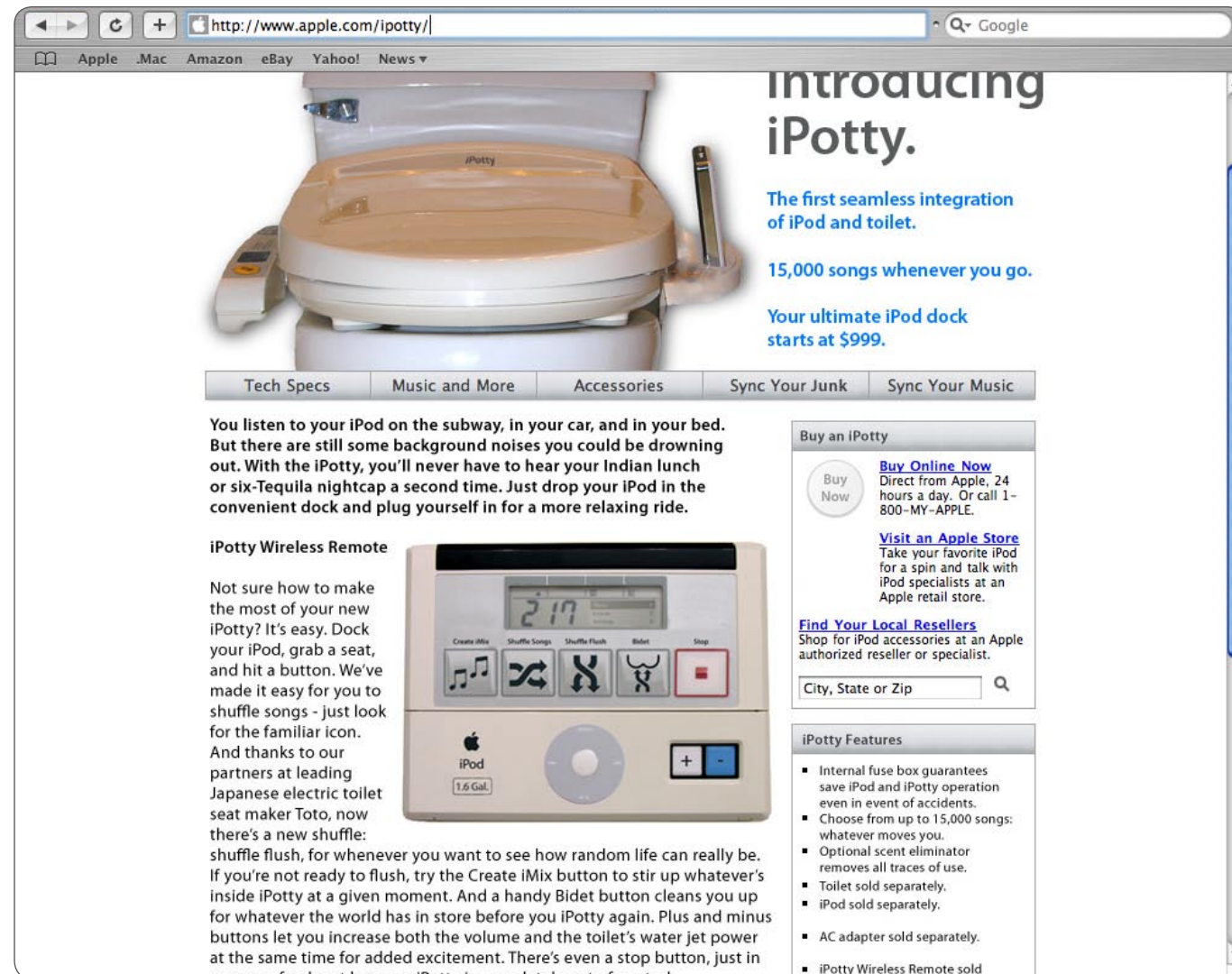
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Closing the Curtain. With iPods on the streets of every major city and in the homes of 10,000,000 people, just how far could Apple ride this wave?



Yes, that's a joke. But it's only a matter of time before some company equips one of Japan's famous electric toilet seats with MP3 playback capability. The seats already have built-in water jets, heating implements (never again suffer a cold toilet), and sometimes deodorizers and body fat checkers. A few even play music or make other sounds to distract outside listeners from whatever might be taking place. We doubt Apple is itching to invade this space, but hey, Dell, are you listening?

As we close this issue, we're thrilled that Apple has opened the doors of iPod ownership to everyone with \$99 to spend. That's generally great news. But will selling 3 million low-priced iPods a quarter push Apple to focus too much on cheap music sticks instead of breakthroughs? As comedian Sinbad jokingly told iPodlounge's Dennis Lloyd after the iPod shuffle debuted, "you just know that some people are going to have a bunch of [shuffles] on their necks at the same time to hold all their music." Someone will do it - Karl Lagerfeld? - but that's a bad thing.

It's not just about how many iPods Apple can sell - what's inside matters, too. Nokia once bragged that its Snake cell phone game was one of history's most popular, judged by ownership of Nokia phones. Honestly, who cares? As fun as it is, the shuffle didn't win Apple its current reputation. Innovation and cutting-edge design were the keys to iPod success, and we hope to see more of that in our next issue.

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